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THE PIRATE PRIEST; or, THE PLANTER GAMBLER'S DAUGHTER.

A Romance of Mystery and Adventure on the Gulf of Mexico Half a Century Ago.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "WILD BILL, THE PISTOL DEAD SHOT,"
"WILD BILL'S GOLD TRAIL," ETC., ETC.



"IT IS THE PIRATE PRIEST! BACK, MEN, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD!"

The Pirate Priest;

OR,

The Planter Gambler's Daughter.

A Romance of Mystery and Adventure
on the Gulf of Mexico and Its Shores
Half a Century Ago.

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TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "QUEEN
HELEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH IN THE FOREST.

"GREAT God! my rival lies dead at my feet,
a bullet in his brain.

"This is fearful!"

"It is fearful, Bradford Carr, that you should
have lured him here to shoot him down without
one word of warning, one instant for repent-
ance!"

The first speaker turned and glared upon the
second one, while he said in a voice hardly aud-
ible:

"Chester Granger, do you dare accuse me of
murdering the man who lies at my feet?"

"Ay, do I, Bradford Carr, accuse you, for I
saw you fire the shot that killed the man who
stood between you and Maud Brandt," was the
answer.

"Liar! dastard! I will force you to take back
that charge!" cried Bradford Carr, and with a
bound he was upon his accuser.

Chester Granger knew well the man whom he
had thus accused, and loudly he called out:

"Help! help!"

Then the grip of Bradford Carr shut off his
cries for he heard the hissing words:

"Retract your words, Granger, or take the
punishment you deserve!"

"Hold, Carr! that man is no match for you—
Ha! Soule Ravelle dead!"

"In the name of Heaven what does all this
mean?" and a young man sprang to the side of
Bradford Carr and laid his hand upon his arm.

"It means, sir, that I came along this path
and found Soule Ravelle lying there dead, and
while bending over him in wonder as to who
could be his slayer, that man appeared upon the
scene and accused me of the murder," and Brad-
ford Carr spoke calmly now, for he had re-
gained his self-control, released Chester Granger
from his fearful grip, and stood calmly by.

"It certainly seems as though you were
guilty, Carr, and, in the absence of an officer of
the law, I must hold you as a prisoner," said the
new-comer.

Bradford Carr's face flushed, and then turned
deadly pale.

He glanced from one to the other of the two
men who stood before him, and smiled with a
certain consciousness of his power to success-
fully resist both of them; but, as though thinking
better of it, he said quietly:

"As you please, sir. I shall offer no resist-
ance; but it will soon be proven that I am not
guilty of so base a crime."

"Chester, you remain here by the body of
poor Soule while I carry this murderer to
prison—Ha! there lies a weapon that will
come in well," and Barton Keys, as he spoke,
stepped off a few paces into the thicket, stooped
and returned with a pistol in his hand.

"How came you with that weapon, sir, for it
is mine?" cried Bradford Carr stepping for-
ward.

"So I see, sir, as it is a weapon I have often
seen you fire—yes, and one of its two barrels
has been discharged, so this will be a strong link
against you in the chain of evidence.

"Come, Mr. Carr, I am sure now that you
are the murderer of poor Ravelle, and if you
attempt resistance, I will be forced to kill you."

"I am no coward, Barton Keys, to attempt
to fly from facing the results of a crime of which
I am not the guilty one.

"Where you got that pistol of mine, I do not
know; but I did not bring it here with me.

"Come, sir, I am willing to go to prison and
take the consequences."

"The gallows will be the consequences of your
act this day," said Chester Granger with a
sneer.

"So be it, I am willing to face even the gal-
lows if I am proven guilty of this charge," and
Bradford Carr walked away, followed by Bar-
ton Keys, while Chester Granger remained by
the body of the slain man.

CHAPTER II.

THE GUESTS OF THE BLUE ANCHOR.

THE "Blue Anchor," as the rambling old struc-
ture was called, was an inn that looked out upon
the blue waters of Mississippi Sound, with the
rolling Mexican Gulf beyond.

Its lawn sloped gently down to a beach of
silvery sand, and upon either side was a park
of the majestic live-oak trees, so beautiful, yet
so common in that region.

Behind the inn was a heavy forest of magno-

lias, pines and oaks, and through these wound
pleasant walks.

Time was when the Blue Anchor was said to
be the home of a Spanish Don, who had turned
pirate, and, with his ill-gotten gold erected the
mansion for his own pleasure.

The Don had disappeared mysteriously one
night, and never heard of more, the place had
become the haunt of pirates, and it was shunned
by all of honest intent.

One night a vessel went ashore on its beach,
and the captain, struck with the beauty of the
place decided to buy it, give up the treacherous
sea, and settle down in that quiet spot, so he set
about to find an owner from whom to purchase.

This owner could not be found, so the Yankee
captain, with commendable enterprise moved
in, sent North for his family, refitted and fur-
nished the old mansion, and hung out before its
spacious doors a huge red sign with a blue an-
chor in the center.

Upon the foot of the sign was this legend:

"THE BLUE ANCHOR INN.

"ENTERTAINMENT FOR MAN AND BEAST.

"CAPTAIN JAKE CURTIS, LANDLORD."

The highway between New Orleans and Mo-
bile ran a mile or so back in the forest, but a
broad avenue was cut out to it, and there was
swung another sign of the Blue Anchor, and
many a traveler was lured to seek repose and
refreshments there.

On the other hand, the planters up and down
the coast were wont to sail there in parties for
a few days' enjoyment and the place becoming
known as a town with the luxuries as well as
the comforts of life, the wealthy merchants of
New Orleans and Mobile were tempted to seek
its cool rooms, shady nooks, and enjoy the
balmy breezes to be had there during the heated
months of summer.

Thus it was that the Blue Anchor became a
famous summer retreat for the wealthy and re-
fined and was becoming such, appears at the
opening scene of my tale of land and sea in
which there is more truth than fiction, as some
of the white-haired dwellers now upon the Gulf
coast can vouch for.

It was in the summer time and thither had
congregated the usual guests of the Blue An-
chor, with a few new arrivals.

Of the former there were half a dozen plan-
ters and their families and as many wealthy
merchants from the cities.

Of those who had not been before at the Blue
Anchor were a Spanish family, said to be
dwellers upon the Mexican coast, and Bradford
Carr, whom the reader has seen marched off to
prison for the crime of murder.

Bradford Carr was a young man from Mary-
land, who, poor in pocket, but rich in mind, had
taken to earning his bread by teaching.

He had one night while walking the streets of
Baltimore after a day of arduous work in teach-
ing, heard a pistol shot and angry cries as
though men were engaged in a life struggle.

Hastening to the scene, he had taken the side
of the weak, for he found one man struggling
against two, while a third lay dead upon the
pavement.

His succor, just in time, saved the life of the
one who fought against two, and the latter
were captured, one severely injured by the
blows given him by the young teacher.

The one rescued was a Southern planter, visit-
ing in Maryland, and his assailants were foot-
pad: who had attempted to rob him of a large
sum of money he was known to have with him,
and who had determined to kill him to secure
it.

"My name is Brandt, sir, Rufus Brandt, and
as one of those fellows gave me a blow from
which I have not recovered yet, I must beg you
to extend your kindness by accompanying me
home," said the gentleman, warmly grasping
the hand of the one who had come to his rescue
and saved his life.

Thus had met Bradford Carr, the poor
teacher, and Colonel Rufus Brandt, a wealthy
Southern planter from the Gulf shores.

The result of this meeting was that Bradford
Carr sailed with the planter for his sunny home,
there to be installed as tutor to the colonel's
son, a boy of sixteen, while a daughter a year
older was then at boarding-school in New
Orleans.

A young man of striking appearance, tall and
superbly formed, with a face that was most at-
tractive, and a fascination of manner that all
that met him seemed to feel, Bradford Carr be-
came a great favorite in the planter's house and
a hero among his neighbors, so that all went
well at the Brandt mansion during the winter
months.

But when the summer came and Maud Brandt
returned home from boarding-school, there
were envious eyes cast at the young tutor
among the young planters of the coast, who
feared they might find in him a dangerous rival
for the hand of the fair girl, whose beauty had
turned the hearts of scores.

Going to the Blue Anchor for the heated term
Colonel Brandt had taken with him his two
children and the tutor, being anxious to intro-

duce into society his lovely daughter and the
dashing young Marylander who had saved his
life.

Among those at the Blue Anchor were Barton
Keys, Chester Granger, Soule Ravelle, and sev-
eral other young aristocrats, who were suitors
for the hand of Maud Brandt, and looked with
cold eyes upon the tutor.

Determined to humiliate him in the eyes of
the maiden, whom they saw treated him most
kindly, they organized a tournament in which
riding, driving, pistol and rifle practice, swim-
ming and swordsmanship were all to be gone
through with for prizes to the "best man."

Bradford Carr had hung modestly back, not
caring, it seemed, to be a contestant; but urged
by his pupil and Maud, he had entered the lists,
and to the deep chagrin of his rivals, had been
the victor to carry off every prize, Maud having
been the one chosen to present the trophies to
the winner.

This so enraged the young planters that they
fairly hated Bradford Carr, and thus matters
stood when another rival came upon the scene,
as one of the most-honored guests of the Blue
Anchor—as far as Captain Curtis was con-
cerned.

CHAPTER III.

AN INSULT PROMPTLY PUNISHED.

THIS new-comer, who was a prized guest at
the Blue Anchor, was a young Mississippi river
planter, dwelling above New Orleans.

He had inherited a vast estate at the death of
his father, some years before, and had made up
his mind to enjoy it.

So thoroughly was he carrying out this in-
tention that his income was swallowed up in the
first few months of the year, and the principal
had to be drawn on to supply his wants for the
balance of the time.

He was a handsome, dashing fellow, high-
tempered, arrogant, and generally with more
faults than virtues.

His father had been a brother officer in the
army with Colonel Brandt, and the latter had
been the guardian of the youth for the year that
elapsed until he became of age and took the
reins in his own hands.

Known to be enormously rich, no one sus-
pected that he was drawing upon other than his
income, though they were amazed at his ex-
travagant mode of life.

Wild, dissipated, and a gambler, he yet
shielded his deeper vices from the eye of the
world, and Colonel Brandt had granted the
wish of his dying father to pledge to the son,
Soule Ravelle, that Maud should be his wife.

Maud had met the young scapegrace and been
really interested in him, not knowing him as he
really was, and had acquiesced in the agree-
ment that she was to be his wife, for there was
no one of her admirers that she liked more.

But when she met Bradford Carr a change
came over her, for she saw that if she married
Soule Ravelle she would love another.

She saw too that Bradford Carr, try to con-
ceal his feelings as he might, loved her, and she
determined that he should at once know that
she was pledged to another.

Thus matters stood when Soule Ravelle ar-
rived at the Blue Anchor.

His suite of rooms, kept for him by the hos-
pitable host, Captain Jake, were at once made
ready for him, and his slaves arriving with his
carriage-horses and dogs, new life was inspired
into the guests of the Blue Anchor.

His intimates, among them Chester Granger
and Barton Keys, greeted him with every show
of delight, and Colonel Brandt welcomed him
warmly and introduced the tutor, Bradford
Carr.

The young aristocrat had already received a
hint of who Bradford Carr was, and had been
warned by Barton Keys that the poor teacher
threatened to be a rival for the hand of Maud.

This, in the eyes of Soule Ravelle would never
do, for the mortgages on his place were to be
raised by the money he got with Maud, and he
at once hated Bradford Carr.

When, therefore, Colonel Brandt introduced
the tutor, the young planter eyed him an in-
stant in a peculiar kind of way, and said in his
drawing manner:

"Yes, colonel, yes, I have heard that you fell
among thieves in your travels; but are you
sure that this was not one of the band, pre-
tending to rescue you, to sneak like a snake into
your family, and strike at the hand that fed
him?"

Colonel Brandt was astounded, while it was
an instant before Bradford Carr could realize
that it was an insult intended for him.

Then, quick as a flash his right fist shot out
from his shoulder, and catching Soule Ravelle
full in the face, laid him his full length upon
the piazza.

"Ha! well done, Carr, for he gravely insulted
you, and Ravelle, you must answer to me for
your conduct to one to whom I did you the hon-
or to present you," said Colonel Brandt sternly.

Soule Ravelle arose slowly to his feet, and
seeing that Colonel Brandt was in no humor to
trifle, said calmly:

"Colonel Brandt, I do offer you my humble
apology for insulting your friend, while of you,

Mr. Carr, I ask pardon, hoping, as my insult has been promptly punished, and I acknowledge my wrong, all will be forgiven when I am willing to grasp the hand that smote me."

Bradford Carr's nature was a manly one, and he instantly held out his hand, while Colonel Brandt said quickly:

"All is forgiven, Ravelle, only do not let your jealous rage, for such I see it is, get the best of you again."

Then turning to the tutor, Colonel Brandt continued:

"Carr, Ravelle here, is pledged as my future son-in-law, and I have no doubt but that some busy tongues have been telling him that you were his rival, when such a thing could not possibly be."

"Now let us have no more of this quarrel, and pledge each other over a glass of some of Captain Jake's best wine."

This was done; but, though no one had been upon the piazza at the time of the insult and its punishment, prying eyes had witnessed all, and it was soon reported about that Soule Ravelle had allowed to go unpunished a blow given him by the young tutor, and through her maid Maud heard of the affair.

"This is strange that you tell me Ellizette, and I fear that Mr. Ravelle means mischief," said Maud to her pretty quadroon maid.

"I'll watch 'em all, missy, and see what they is up to," responded Ellizette, and with this assurance Maud Brandt was satisfied, as she was well aware that the quadroon possessed a real talent for finding out all that was going on.

But on the part of Soule Ravelle there seemed no mischief brewing, and all went well, apparently and happily for him, for a few evenings after the insult and the blow, Colonel Brandt publicly announced the engagement of his daughter to Soule Ravelle.

It was a bitter blow to all the beaux of the Blue Anchor, and many a graceful dancer looked sad in the waltz that night, while Bradford Carr pleaded illness and did not join in the festivities of the young folks in the parlor, or the elder ones about the whist table, but kept to his room.

His secret love had become known to all, and many pitied him, for they felt that he was a man whom unrequited love would hit hard.

There were other fair maidens who would have been happy to have won the love of the young tutor, poor though he was; but they held no power to win his heart from Maud, whom they also envied for carrying off so rich a prize as Soule Ravelle was believed to be.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE.

It was the afternoon prior to the engagement of Maud and Soule Ravelle being made known, that Colonel Brandt sat in his room writing, when he was aroused by a knock.

"Ah, Ravelle, it is you; come in and sit down," he said as the young planter entered at his invitation to do so.

"Yes, colonel, and I have disturbed you to have a talk upon a matter near my heart."

"I am at your service, Soule, so out with it."

"Please tell me where you picked up that handsome fellow, who is your son Irving's tutor?"

"Ah, Carr you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well now he is a handsome fellow, is he not, and as brave as he is good-looking?"

"But where did you pick him up, sir?"

"He picked me up, Soule, for he saved my life, and finding him to be a poor teacher I offered him a position as Irving's tutor."

"You are sure he was a teacher, sir?"

"Of course, for I visited his little school."

"He comes of good stock, too, none better in Maryland, though he has no immediate kindred, and I am delighted to give him a home, while he is a gentleman of refinement, and anticipates studying for the church; but why do you ask about him, Ravelle?"

"I will tell you, sir, if you will not think me obtrusive."

"Go ahead, Soule, and let me hear what you have to say."

"I have the honor of being the intended husband of your daughter?"

"You have, Ravelle, and I know of no man I would rather see her marry."

"Well, colonel, I am anxious to make her my wife this fall."

"What, so soon?"

"Yes, colonel, and, as our engagement is not known generally, though suspected, I would feel obliged if you would announce it to our intimates here."

"My dear Soule, why do this?"

"Because, sir, rumors come to me that Miss Brandt is interested in your son's tutor more than in myself, and the announcement of an engagement will put an end to such stories."

"Certainly, and I will gladly do so, as soon as I have had a talk with Maud."

Soule Ravelle seemed pleased at this, and soon after took his leave, while Colonel Brandt sought the cosy room where Maud dwelt.

He found her sketching a pretty view from her window, and looking very beautiful in her walking costume.

And certainly she was beautiful in face and form, while her heart and soul were full of purity and nobleness.

"Father, I have just finished a little painting which Mr. Carr asked me to make him."

"It is a scene from my window here, and I wish your criticism upon it."

He took the painting and gazed at it closely, while he said:

"It is most skillfully executed, Maud, and you deserve credit for it; but why not give it to Soule Ravelle?"

Her face slightly flushed, while she answered: "Mr. Ravelle is a rich man and capable of purchasing pictures by famous artists, while Mr. Carr is poor, and I wished to give him a little souvenir."

"Maud, it is of Mr. Carr that I came to speak to you."

"He does not intend to leave us, does he?" she asked quickly.

"I have not heard that he did, and I would be very sorry if such was the case; but, Maud, you have not forgotten that you are pledged to Saul Ravelle?"

"No, sir, I know that I was bargained off in some way to him."

"You have consented to marry him."

"Oh, yes, and I suppose that I will have to do so, unless I rebel."

"Maud, why do you talk so?" asked her father with an almost frightened look upon his face.

"You surely would not refuse to become Ravelle's wife?"

"I cannot see why I should marry him, sir."

"Because he loves you devotedly, and—"

"And I do not love him."

"Bahl! what do you know about love, just out of a boarding-school as you are, child?"

"I know enough, sir, to feel that I do not love Soule Ravelle."

"Why, Maud, this is rank treason, and I must at once announce that you are engaged to Ravelle, or you will give me cause to regret it."

"Father, you shall not make any such announcement."

"You and a dying man made a compact to bind me to Soule Ravelle, and I acquiesced, for I cared for no one."

"Now I have found out that I do not love Soule, and I do not wish you to announce an engagement with him until I know more of my own heart."

"But, Maud, Soule just visited me in my room and asked that I should make it, and further, that you should become his wife in the fall."

"Well, sir, I say that such announcement shall not be made until I know my own heart better than I do."

Colonel Brandt sprung impatiently to his feet and paced to and fro.

At last he halted before Maud and said:

"My child, Soule has heard rumors that you are interested in Bradford Carr, and he wishes your engagement known, to put away these idle stories."

Maud's face flushed crimson, but she said firmly:

"Father, I will not consent to allow our engagement known, nor to marry Soule Ravelle for a long time yet."

Colonel Brandt looked troubled, and his face grew pale, as he paced to and fro in deep thought.

At last he sat down by Maud, and, taking her hand, said softly:

"My child, you know that I have one besetting sin?"

"You refer to your love of gambling, sir?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had given up staking large sums in play, sir?"

"I have; but Maud, you remember that I was appointed Soule's guardian, and had charge of his property for a year or more?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, Maud, I was not worthy of the trust, for I gambled heavily and lost an enormous sum."

"In my hand I had the amount I needed in cash, only it belonged to Soule."

"I could not raise other money, for you know that Brandt Manor belongs to your brother Irving, with all its slaves, and the Rigalet plantation and its negroes is yours, left you by your mother, I getting only an interest in each of them; for so the wills were made, and justly so, as, gambling as I do, all might have gone."

"Now, I used this money of Soule's, and told him that I had loaned it out on good interest, and he was satisfied."

"But he told me the other day, when I paid him interest on it, that he wished to call it in, and I have not a dollar to give him."

"This is fearful, father."

"I told him that I could not get it until fall, as the agreement with the parties so read."

"Now, Maud, your mother left in your name for me, banking funds which you alone can draw out; and it was her desire that when you were married you should give me that money, so that I would be dependent upon no one."

"That sum, with its interest, just covers the amount I owe Ravelle."

"You shall have it, father," said Maud, in a low tone.

"Yes, my child; but you are not able to draw that money until you are married to Soule Ravelle, who you know was a great favorite of your mother's, and she desired to see him your husband."

"Oh, father!" said Maud, deeply pained at all she heard.

"Now, Maud, you can appoint a time in the fall to marry Soule, and a few days after I can name as the day for the payment of his money; for you can, as Mrs. Ravelle, draw it."

"This you can pay to him, for I will not touch it, and I will live with Irving until I die."

"If I do not marry Soule Ravelle, father?" asked Maud, in a constrained voice.

"You know the alternative, Maud."

"What is the alternative, father?"

"Ravelle will be furious because you cast him off. I will not be able to pay him the money, and to prison I will have to go!"

"Oh, father! do not say this, for I make the sacrifice, and will marry Soule Ravelle whenever you appoint the day!" Maud cried, in tones that seemed to come from her inmost heart.

With a gladdened face, Colonel Brandt kissed his daughter affectionately and left the room, while poor Maud seemed almost crushed at the prospect of becoming the wife of one whom city belles were setting snares for continually.

That night the announcement of the engagement was made, and a shadow fell upon the hearts of those who had hoped to win the beauty and heiress of Brandt Manor for themselves.

CHAPTER V.

BREWING MISCHIEF.

"KEYS, have you heard the news?" asked Chester Granger, bursting into the room of Barton Keys, as that young man was dressing for supper.

"No, what is it?"

"Why, old Brandt coolly made known awhile since, that his daughter was to become the wife of Soule Ravelle."

"The devil! is this so?" and Barton Keys turned pale, as he sunk into a chair.

"It is true, for he was seated in the parlor, together with a number of old gossips, when in walked Ravelle."

"The colonel arose, and turning to those present, said right out:

"My friends, it gives me pleasure to present to you my future son-in-law."

"No!" gasped Barton Keys.

"Fact! and Moore was there, and Loyd and Earl, and several others who loved the fair Maud, among them being myself."

"They turned pale and bolted, while I congratulated Ravelle in a sickly kind of way, and calling me aside, he told me that he must have the money he loaned me some time ago in the city, along with the gambling debts I owe him."

"He'll be after me next," growled Keys.

"Yes, and you'll pay him, of course."

"Of course I won't, for the old man won't give me another dollar this year, and I owe more now than I could pay with my inheritance if I got it to-day."

"Ravelle must wait."

"So I told him."

"Well?"

"He said he would wait until I returned to the city, and then if I did not pay him, he would send the bills to my father."

"Ah! he threatens, does he?"

"Yes, and will carry out his threat; but I have promised and promised him, you know."

"And so have I; but he will have to wait."

"But he won't, and between us, Keys, I believe he is cramped himself, and is going to marry *la belle* Maud for her money."

"It may be so; but what about the tutor?"

"Bradford Carr?"

"Yes."

"Oh! you should have seen his face when the colonel made known the engagement."

"He heard it?"

"He did, for he was seated over by a window reading."

"He turned livid, tried to get up, sunk back into his seat, and then fairly tottered out of the room."

"I really believe that he loves the girl more than her money."

"Bahl! how could a man do that— Come in!"

The last two words were called out as a knock came upon the door.

Soule Ravelle entered, and Chester Granger excused himself, and departed, muttering:

"Now Keys is to be dunned, and I'll see what comes of it."

"Well, Keys," began Soule Ravelle, when Chester Granger had departed.

"I hate to dun a man; but I have made some purchases of late, and must pay for them, so I ask you for the few thousands borrowed money that you owe me."

"I am sorry, Ravelle, but—"

"So you have said very often, Keys, and I am sorry to press you; but I must do so."

"I will not be able to pay you until Christmas."

"I must have it within two weeks."
 "I cannot raise it."
 "You must, for I need it."
 "I cannot."
 "Well, I will have to present the bill to your father for payment."
 "For God's sake, Ravelle don't do that, for he would disinherit me," cried Barton Keys.
 "I am sorry, Keys, but you have put me off continually."
 "If I did not need the money I would allow the debt to run along; but I must have it, and within two weeks I expect to hear from you, or I must demand the money of your father."
 With this Soule Ravelle left the room, and Barton Keys began to pace to and fro his room his face gloomy and his mind busy.
 Night at length darkened the room and descending to the piazza, he waked up Chester Granger.
 "Come with me," he said simply, and they adjourned to his room in the "bachelors' wing" of the Blue Anchor inn.
 "Ches, he dunned me."
 "I know it."
 "Gives me two weeks to pay."
 "Or—"
 "Or sends in bill to my father."
 "Well?"
 "It will ruin me, for the old man would cut me off without a dollar."
 "And likewise with my father."
 "What is to be done, Ches?"
 "I do not know."
 "I do, for I have concocted a little plan to pay our debts."
 "What is it, Bart?"
 "You will aid me?"
 "Of course."
 "Then I will tell you my plan, and it will pay our debts, and perhaps give us a chance for the hand of *la belle* Brandt once more."
 "If I could only win her," said Chester Granger with enthusiasm.
 "Yes, if I only could; but, between you and I let the best man win the maiden fair: but now we must brew our little plot to save our credit, and get a rival out of the field."
 Then in a low tone Barton Keys made known his plot of mischief, and the two profligate gold-hunters clasped hands to carry out the plan to the bitter end.

CHAPTER VI.

ACCUSED OF MURDER.

KNOWING the characters of my story, as they do now many of those who were guests at the Blue Anchor, my kind reader will better understand the scene that opens the first chapter, when Bradford Carr is found by the dead body of Soule Ravelle.

About a league from the spot, where the profligate young planter had met his death from some mysterious cause, was a small village.

Thither Barton Keys carried his prisoner, made known the facts of the case to a constable, and Bradford Carr found himself behind the bars of a jail.

His was a brave nature, and, whether guilty or not, of the crime of which he was accused, he took it coolly, and pacing to and fro his little cell awaited the alternative.

Back to the Blue Anchor from the village went Barton Keys, and a furore of excitement followed his arrival, when the news fled from lip to lip that Soule Ravelle was dead, and that Bradford Carr had killed him.

Why had he done so?

Had it been a duel between them?

Was jealousy at the bottom of it all?

Such were the questions asked on all sides, and none were satisfactorily answered.

As for Maud, the news shocked her greatly, but she soon became calm, though she retired to her room, refusing to see any one but her maid.

Her father at once dispatched a vehicle to bring back the body of Ravelle, and then drove to the village to see the prisoner.

On his way there his brain was busy, and he muttered:

"Ravelle dead, and not a slip of paper signed by me to show that I owed him that money, so I am safe."

"But, poor fellow, I am sorry he ended his days thus."

"And Maud?"

"Well, she did not love him, so his death will not break her heart; but I have half an idea that she does love Carr, and his act will pain her deeply."

"But what am I to do about it?"

"I hardly know; but one thing is certain, Carr saved my life and I brought him out here, and jealousy is doubtless the cause of his crime, so I will get the best legal talent to defend him."

"If all fails, then I will feel that I have done my duty for the poor fellow."

Thus mused the colonel until his carriage drew rein at the jail.

The jailer knew Colonel Brandt, and readily admitted him to the dismal room in which Bradford Carr stood, gazing out of the iron-barred window.

"Well, Colonel Brandt, this is kind of you to

so promptly look me up," said Bradford Carr, pleasantly, grasping the colonel's hand.

"I came as soon as Keys brought the news, Carr; but this is a bad fix you have gotten yourself into."

"Not very, sir, for I think that all will come well when it is known that I did not kill Mr. Ravelle."

"You did not kill him?" asked Colonel Brandt, in amazement.

"I did not, sir."

"Barton Keys says that you did, and, coming to the Blue Anchor, so reported."

"Mr. Keys either believes what he says, or tells a malicious lie; which, I am at a loss to know."

"What! can there be any doubt of your killing him?"

"Certainly, sir, though circumstances may, with some, point to my guilt."

"And what circumstances point to your innocence, Carr?"

"First, I had no cause of quarrel with Mr. Ravelle, who was a man I really liked, though the regard I know was not mutual."

"Second, I am not one to shoot a man down like a dog."

"True, but Granger found you bending over the body of Ravelle, and seeing that you were discovered, so Keys says, you sprung upon Chester to kill him, when he came to the rescue and you were taken prisoner."

"Colonel Brandt, I was walking alone in the forest, as I do every afternoon, and took my usual stroll toward the spot where I was wont to throw myself down and read for an hour or so."

"I saw there, to my horror, poor Ravelle, and hardly had I bent over him when Chester Granger appeared, and, accusing me of being his murderer, I sprung upon him to force him to retract his words."

"His cries for help brought Barton Keys, and awaking to a sense that I, a powerful man, was imposing upon a comparatively weak one, I released my grip on Granger."

"Well, to my surprise my own pistol, one which I thought I had left in my room, was found near by, and I came here to prison with Keys, who, with Granger, accuses me of being guilty."

"That, sir, is all I have to say for myself, and now may I ask if Miss Brandt knows of the sad affair?"

"She does."

"It must have been a severe shock to her?"

"It was, and she has shut herself in her room and sees no one."

"I am sorry, so sorry for it all; but I beg of you to tell her that I am not guilty, and I hope that you will also believe that I am innocent."

"I wish to so think, Carr; but there is such a chain of circumstances about the affair, pointing to your guilt, that I fear it will be hard for you to prove yourself guiltless; but I shall, you may rest assured, have you ably defended."

"I thank you, sir: but of Irving, my young pupil?" and Bradford Carr spoke with feeling in referring to Irving Brandt, to whom he was deeply attached.

"He has not returned from his pleasure cruise yet to Mobile, but shall be told just what you say as to your innocence when he returns."

"And he will believe me."

"I agree with you, for the boy is as devoted to you as he is to me."

"But now I must leave you, Carr, and I will see to it that you are not neglected or forgotten."

The colonel now arose and took his departure, and over the heart of the prisoner stole the shadow of the gallows and he bowed his head in grief.

CHAPTER VII.

A BOY'S FRIENDSHIP.

To all who heard the stories told by Chester Granger and Barton Keys, of the scene they had come upon in the forest, it was a foregone conclusion that Bradford Carr would be convicted of murder.

The trial was quickly held in the little court-room at the village, and when the prisoner faced his accusers he saw before him the entire household from the Blue Anchor, the genial proprietor of that hospitable home by the Gulf occupying a front seat.

Bradford Carr also saw there the face of Maud Brandt, pale and earnest, and he caught her eyes fixed upon him in a way that seemed to read his thoughts.

Colonel Brandt had employed his own lawyer to defend the prisoner, and all being in readiness the trial was begun, and quickly ended by the conviction of the young tutor, for the jury, without leaving their seats, pronounced him "guilty."

How it could be otherwise people could not wonder, with the stories told by the two friends—Granger and Keys—the finding of Carr's pistol upon the ground, where he had thrown it in the thicket, and the fact that a letter was taken from Soule Ravelle's pocket which was written by Bradford Carr, appointing a meeting with him in the forest.

Bradford Carr said he had not gone there armed, knew not how his pistol got there, and that the letter to Ravelle, purporting to have been written by him, was a forgery.

But no one seemed to believe this, or at least no one raised any objection, and the judge pronounced his sentence amid deathlike silence.

The prisoner arose, faced the judge, and without the quiver of a nerve heard the awful doom that he should end his life upon the gallows.

A groan broke from some lips at this, and the trial was ended; and back to his cell went the prisoner, so young, so hopeful only a few weeks before.

As Bradford Carr left the court-room, some one, he knew not who, slipped a paper into his hand, and when he was alone in his cell he read what was written thereon.

It was:

"Be hopeful, for every man that is sentenced does not die."

"I do not believe you guilty, and neither does sister Maud."

"You will hear from me again, for I am your friend, if I am but a boy. Yours,

"IRVING BRANDT."

"God bless that noble boy," said Bradford Carr, and he stepped up to the window and looked out.

Just as he did so he saw a horseman ride slowly by the jail, at the same time gazing intently upon it.

It was a young rider, a youth of sixteen, with a handsome, fearless face, dark, fiery eyes, and he sat his horse with the air of one born in the saddle.

He was dressed in the white suit common to the wealthy classes on the Gulf coast, and wore a dove-colored sombrero that gave him a rakish look.

As the prisoner caught sight of him he gave a slight call; the youth halted, rode closer to the jail, and Bradford Carr threw out a letter which he had already written and sealed ready for delivery.

Irving Brandt swooped from his saddle, picked up the letter, and with a wave of the hand rode off at a gallop.

After a rapid ride he drew up before the door of the Blue Anchor, and a servant took his horse, while he ascended to the second story and knocked at a door.

It was opened by Ellizette, who said:

"Missy Maud won't see anybody, Massa Irving."

"She told me to say so, sah."

"Tell her that I wish to see her for a moment," the youth replied.

"Missy says you kin come in, sah," was the answer of the quadroon when she returned.

Maud was sitting by the open window gazing out upon the Sound, and her beautiful eyes were red from weeping.

She had cast aside the dress she had worn in the court-room for a *robe de chambre*, and glanced up as her brother entered, while she said:

"Oh, Irving, is this not terrible; to think that one of our household should be taken from us by a fearful death upon the gallows?"

"It's awful, sis, but Mr. Carr isn't dead yet," was the cool reply, and the youth sat down by the side of his sister.

"No, but within the month he will be."

"I am not so sure of that, sis."

"Why, Irving, is there any hope for him?"

"Have you heard any news?" quickly asked Maud.

"No, there is no hope for him if he depends upon law and lawyers; but, sis, I don't believe Bradford can be guilty."

"I feel, I know that he is not; but a jury has pronounced him guilty, and a judge says that he must die upon the gallows."

"Well, I know that they all say so, and that they think he killed Soule Ravelle to keep him from marrying you; but I don't believe it."

"He loved you, sis, that I know, for I am no fool if I am a boy, and my idea is that you loved him, and made it look as dark for poor Carr as a Mississippi swamp at midnight."

"But folks may hint what they please, I don't think that he would do a mean act, let alone shoot a man down like an assassin."

"If he had wanted to get rid of Ravelle, he could have found cause of quarrel with him and then shot him in a duel; but he didn't lure him out there into the pines to shoot him like a dog, and forty judges and as many juries could not make me believe it."

Irving Brandt had spoken rapidly and earnestly, and his sister had listened with an expression upon her face which plainly showed that his words gave her joy.

But she said sadly:

"I am glad to hear you say this, Irving; but he has been tried and sentenced, and he must die."

"I tell you, sis, I believe that I can prove that you are mistaken."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked Maud.

"Oh, I mean that Bradford Carr has one friend who will not desert him, even if that friend is not a man yet."

"But here is a letter addressed to you, and

"I'll leave you to read it, and then come back to night and have a talk with you."

He handed her the letter, thrown him from the jail window, and walked out of the room, leaving her gazing at her name written on the back with a strange, far-away look.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LETTER FROM A PRISON CELL.

FOR some time did Maud Brandt stand by the window of her room, clasping the letter given her by her brother, and seemingly striving for courage to open it.

Throughout all the sad events of the past few weeks she had kept up a brave heart.

She knew that she was the cynosure of all eyes, and yet she had shown to the world no sign of her suffering.

She had gone to the funeral of Soule Ravelle, had seen him laid away back in the pines, and stood over his grave with a face that was sad but tearless, and her calm mien had not been broken down.

She had gone to the trial as a witness, and had given her testimony frankly, that Bradford Carr had never breathed one word of love to her, and yet it was said that he had killed Soule Ravelle that he might win her himself.

She had not wavered at the awful sentence that had been passed upon the prisoner and yet when she had returned to her room she had thrown herself down upon the floor and wept so that Ellizette was most anxious regarding her.

But at last she became calm, changed her dress, and had just taken her seat by the window when her brother came.

Now he had gone, and she had in her hand a letter from Bradford Carr.

At last she gained courage to break the seal, and its contents she slowly read over, her face flushing and paling by turns, and many a tear dropping upon the paper she held in her hands.

The letter was as follows, and was written in a hand full of character:

"IN JAIL, Friday.

"MISS BRANDT:—While awaiting the hour to come around for my trial, I presume to address you this communication.

"It is Friday, and my case goes to the jury to-day, but, from the testimony against me, I am certain that my doom is already settled, so my words come to you as the last words of a dying man, and I beg that you will not be angry with me.

"After to-day I will stand upon the brink of a precipice, awaiting the word to step off into eternity.

"Could I die as a soldier, or in some good cause, I would not regret death, but to go down to an ignominious grave through a gallows' noose is something awful to contemplate.

"But, whatever the death, the shame, the dishonor, I shall meet it as I have lived, without fear.

"Time was when I held ambition to become a man above my fellows, but, though born of a good name and blood, poverty held me down, and I had to work hard for a support for those dependent upon me, an invalid mother and sister.

"Death took them from me just before I met your father, and I gladly left old scenes and associations to seek new, for I had determined to enter the priesthood, it being my mother's dying wish that I should do so, and so I pledged her, strangely adding:

"If death does not forbid, mother."

"Now, death will forbid, and her dream for her son, my hope, is ended.

"Left to myself I would have chosen another calling, but my promise to her I considered sacred, and I intended to become a priest, if life was spared to me, hoping to do much good in that position.

"Now the gallows ends all hope, and, standing beneath its black shadow as I do, I wish to say to you that I am guiltless of the crime that I am charged with.

"Appearances are fearfully against me I admit, but appearances are often deceitful, and why not in my case?

"It is claimed, and was so put forth, that I loved you, and that, looking upon poor Ravelle as a rival, I sought to get rid of him, expecting to escape detection as his murderer.

"It was justly claimed that I loved you, and I do, and will up to the latest breath that is strangled out of my body.

"I was seen to suffer when your father made known your engagement to Mr. Ravelle, for it came upon me so suddenly that I could not hide my feelings, as my love is not the ordinary love of man.

"I felt deeply, and men and women saw my white face, and the next day Soule Ravelle died, and I was found by his dead body.

"So ends the chapter of my life; but I beg of you, ere I go hence into the great unknown, strangled like a dog, that you will, if in your heart you so believe me, send me one line to tell me so.

"Then I will die without fear, and can ask Heaven to forgive those who have murdered me.

"Wishing you all happiness in life, and thanking you for the many kind words which you have given me, a stranger in your midst, I am, unto the bitter end,

Devotedly yours,

BRADFORD CARR.

"P. S.—There are a few trinkets that I leave behind me, which I will direct to have left to your charge.

"The ring kindly wear for memory of me, if you deem me guiltless.

B. C."

Until the shadows of night shut out the waters before her, Maud Brandt sat with bowed head, brooding over the letter she had received from Bradford Carr, and then she cried in a tone full of anguish:

"I do believe him guiltless, and may God have mercy upon him."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATHER'S PLEDGE.

ELLIZETTE aroused Maud from her reverie by bringing in her tea, which remained untasted, for food would have choked her, and soon after her father came in and sat down by her side.

"My poor little girl, you have had a hard time of it of late, have you not?"

"Not so hard, father, as poor Bradford Carr has had," was the very significant reply.

"True, and I feel most deeply for him, but nothing can be done to save him."

"Are you sure of this, sir?"

"Yes, for I consulted with the lawyer and he told me it would but be a prolongation of the agony to have another trial and the result would be the same."

"Still I believe him guiltless, father."

"I could almost hope not, rather than see him die on the gallows for a crime which he never committed."

"Such he will do, for he never killed Soule Ravelle."

"Then who did?"

"Ah, that question is unanswerable, sir."

"You are the only one who believes him innocent, Maud."

"No, sir; my brother so thinks."

"Well, he was deeply attached to Carr."

"And so am I, sir, and so did you appear to be."

"I was; I loved him as though he had been my own son; but against all facts—"

"All seeming facts, sir."

"Well all seeming facts, I go with the tide and believe him guilty."

"Well, father, I can give you no proof of his innocence, and so must not urge it; but how does Mr. Ravelle's death affect you?"

"How do you mean, Maud?"

"Your financial affairs?"

"Ah! it is about that in part that I came to see you."

"Well, sir?"

"I find from letters received to-day that Ravelle was almost penniless."

"Why, father?"

"Yes, my child, he had mortgaged his estate and many of his slaves."

"Father!"

"No wonder you are amazed, Maud."

"I thought him immensely wealthy."

"So did every one, but he has lived like a profligate, and gambled away thousands in a night!"

"Is this true, father?"

"Indeed, it is but too true, for I have the letter from the man who loaned him money as he needed it.

"He shows proof that Soule got from him large sums at different times, giving at first mortgages upon his plantations, and then upon his slaves, until fully four-fifths of his inheritance is thus bound.

"No one knew of these transactions, excepting the money broker who let him have the money, and he writes to me offering a compromise."

"To you, father?"

"Yes, for Ravelle's will leaves all his wealth to you."

Maud sprang to her feet in amazement.

"To me, sir?"

"Yes, and why not?"

"Why should he, sir?"

"He expected you to be his wife; and his will was made the day he received his inheritance."

"His kindred can take what he has left them," coldly said Maud.

"He has no kindred in this country to claim it."

"Knowing this, and how his will reads, the banker has written me that he will not make known the existence of the mortgages, but that he will let me, for you, as I am executor named in the will, buy in the estate and slaves, if we so wish, or advertise it for sale if we do not.

"This will cause the home place and his other plantation, with the slaves, to sell at a good figure, and out of that the mortgages can be paid and a handsome sum realized for you."

"I do not wish it, father."

"Then give it to charity."

"I will do something of that kind—yes, I will build a memorial chapel to poor Soule, near where he now lies among the pines and magnolias."

"But about the debt you owed him, father?"

"You have a right to claim that of me too, Maud."

"Let it go with the rest, sir; but do we lose the amount deposited by mother and which I could only draw upon marrying Soule Ravelle?"

"No, his death cancels that, and when of age you can draw that money, so my affairs are brightening once more."

"Brightening, sir, with the man who left me his wealth lying yonder in his grave among the pines? Brightening, when the man you brought from his Northern home languishes in prison awaiting death by the hangman? Brightening, father, when you, free from anxiety once more, will rush again to the gaming-table?"

"No! no! no! Shadows are creeping over us, I fear, that may cause you and I and Irving to go down to our graves in gloom."

Maud had spoken with an intensity of feeling that made her gambler father cower before her.

The gaming table had been his *bête noir*, for he had run through with his own inheritance, and would have squandered his children's property in his mad infatuation had it not been placed beyond his reach.

A gallant soldier, a courtly gentleman, loving father and true friend and master, he yet was a gambler, and had he not been in fetters he would have risked his last dollar.

He had vowed, as the drunkard vows, not to touch the fatal cards again, and he had broken those vows.

Now he felt the full weight of his daughter's words, and he bowed his head in grief.

He had entered her room, glad in the thought that, as she was Ravelle's heiress, he would not have to pay the sum of money due him, and that enough could be realized from the estate to give him, as executor, gold for trying his luck at gaming once more.

Now that hope was dashed away, and he saw that he was criminal in his acts, and must change his career if he cared for the respect of his children, whose eyes were now being opened to his sins.

For a few moments not a word was spoken, and then the strong man, with firm resolve, said, in a low, trembling voice:

"Maud, I will pledge you my word never to gamble again."

Maud was happy in this promise, for she had hoped that it would not be broken, and then her father said:

"Maud, I find in an account-book, left by Ravelle among his effects in his room, items regarding the money he had received on mortgages, so I know that the banker's statements are correct.

"But I also find a column of loans and another of gambling-debts due him."

"There are a few of the former and a number of the latter, and in both columns the names of Chester Granger and Barton Keys figure largely."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, Maud, and each owes him several thousands in borrowed money and gambling-debts."

"I am surprised, sir, for I supposed that both Mr. Granger and Mr. Keys were wealthy, and that they gambled I did not suspect, any more than I did that Soule Ravelle did so."

"Well, they owe him borrowed money and gambling-debts, that's sure, and I shall make out their bills and hand them in for you."

"I beg of you not to do this, father, for as death cancels your debts to Mr. Ravelle, let it do the same for them, as it would not be just to push one claim and not the other."

Colonel Brandt winced under this, but said:

"Well, it shall be as you say, Maud, and now I will not worry you more; but I wish to write some letters to-night, and had to see you before I did so."

Kissing her good-night, he took his departure; but meeting Chester Granger and Barton Keys, just opposite to his room, the old habit was too strong in him for resistance, and he said:

"Ah, young gentlemen, I am glad to see you, for I wish to talk with you upon a little matter of business."

"Just walk into my room, please."

CHAPTER X.

THE BROKEN PLEDGE.

INTO the spider's parlor, as Colonel Brandt called himself mentally, walked the two flies, as he considered the two young men, and they took seats and the decanter of brandy was pushed toward them.

Both Barton Keys and Chester Granger wondered what matter of business it was that Colonel Brandt had to talk over with them.

They had both loved Maud from their first meeting with her, or at least her money, and had been anxious to win her.

As true gentlemen should, they had asked the colonel's permission to win the hand of his daughter, and each knowing the other's secret, even, it had not made them foes, though rivals.

Colonel Brandt had told them both about the same, that his daughter had been pledged to another, but that he had no objections to them or their suit, and that Maud had her heart in her own keeping.

They had both laid siege to her heart with such indifferent result that they were assured that they could not win.

Now, as the one whom they knew to have been pledged to Maud was dead, they held a hope that the colonel had something to say to them as suitors for the hand which death had freed.

"It has been fearful, young gentlemen, this death of poor Ravelle, and trial of Carr," began the colonel.

"Fearful, indeed, sir, and we have all suffered deeply; but with the hanging of Carr all the agony will be over, and I sincerely hope that next season the guests of the Blue Anchor will not be visited by such a reign of terror," said Barton Keys coolly, while his comrade nervously played with the decanter before him.

"I trust so, sincerely, Keys, for we have had enough of the tragic; but what I wished to

speak to you about was the will left by Soule Ravelle."

"Ah, yes, I heard that he had made Miss Brandt his heiress."

"You heard this?"

"Yes, sir, Ravelle's lawyer is my friend, and writing him of what had occurred, I received a letter to-day telling me that Soule had made Miss Brandt his heiress."

"So he has, the noble fellow, left her every dollar of his property."

"That does not alter my feelings toward your daughter, Colonel Brandt, and now that she is free I hope still to be her suitor," chirped in Chester Granger.

"I should not think, sir, that it would alter your feelings toward her, but on the contrary increase your ardor," bluntly said the colonel, and Granger flushed, for he felt that he had been seen through as though he was as transparent as a glass.

Barton Keys laughed, and came to the rescue of his friend with:

"I think, Colonel Brandt, that Ches spoke from a misunderstanding of the case, his desire having been to say that had Miss Maud lost everything, instead of inherited a fortune, that his feelings for her would have been the same."

"Yes; that is what I meant to say," quickly put in Granger.

"Well, young gentlemen, among the items of my daughter's inheritance I find that you are remembered."

"Indeed! this was noble of Soule," cried Barton Keys.

"Yes, it was most kind, indeed," echoed Chester Granger.

Taking the private note-book of Soule Ravelle from his pocket, Colonel Brandt said quietly:

"Yes, I will read you the items as he entered them."

"First we have, under date of many a year ago, the following:

"Loaned to Barton Keys five hundred dollars."

"Due me from Chester Granger a gambling-debt of six hundred and fifty dollars."

While the colonel was looking for other items Chester Granger and Barton Keys sat like men dazed with astonishment.

They moved not, they spoke not, while Colonel Brandt read a list of their indebtedness for borrowed money and gambling-debts, that amounted to over five thousand dollars each.

During this reading Barton Keys, knowing what was coming, regained his nerve, and was smiling when Colonel Brandt looked up and said:

"Well, young gentlemen, that completes the list as far as you are both concerned, and, as you see, it leaves you debtors to Miss Maud Brandt for quite a snug sum, which, as the executor of the estate, I will receive from you, receipting for the same accordingly."

"Yes, colonel, the items are there, as you read them; but now kindly look and see if they are not all canceled?" said Barton Keys.

The colonel glanced over the items and answered:

"No, sir, not one of them."

"Then Ravelle has failed to cancel them."

"There are others canceled here by the word *Paid* written across them, but such word does not appear upon one of yours."

"Nor mine, sir?" asked Chester Granger angrily.

"Nor yours, sir."

"This is too bad, Colonel Brandt, for I saw Ches pay Ravelle every dollar of his indebtedness the day of his arrival here."

"Indeed, Mr. Keys?"

"Yes, sir; and did not you find among Soule's effects quite a sum of money?"

"Yes, some thousands."

"It is the money paid him by Granger, for Soule told me he had failed to bring any funds with him, and that Ches had come to the front just at the right time to save him from shaving on his bankers."

"This is strange, gentlemen."

"It is more remarkable, Colonel Brandt, that where both Granger and myself have paid our debts, not one of the items are marked paid."

"I am sorry for the oversight, gentlemen, and if I was acting for myself, I would let the matter go as it is, but for another I must take this book as I find it, and the sums I will have to ask you to make good."

The two young men seemed deeply chagrined, and Chester Granger turned to Barton Keys as spokesman, and he replied, as though seized with a sudden thought:

"Colonel Brandt, we have both paid those bills, and it is hard to have to repay them; but I am willing to compromise."

"In what manner, Mr. Keys?"

"I have heard that you are an excellent hand at cards."

"I have played, sir."

"Now I will stake the claim you hold against Granger and myself upon the sum you have there charged to me, and play you for it."

"If I lose, I will pay you the full indebtedness."

"If I win, then you can just cancel the debts of Ches and myself, and pay the amount you put up."

Colonel Brandt saw an opportunity of winning in cash the amounts charged in Ravelle's book against the two young men.

He knew that Maud would not sanction the collection of it, so he had no idea of letting her know about the affair.

If he won, he would get a snug sum, and just then he needed ready money.

If he lost, then he would lose but about half the sum he would have won if the game had been his.

The temptation was great and he hesitated.

His pledge to Maud was before him, but it was forgotten in the temptation, and he agreed to the terms.

The two players then began their games, the rule being the best two in three.

Colonel Brandt won the first and Barton Keys won the two last.

With a sad heart the colonel canceled the items against the two young men in the note-book, and drawing from his pocket a roll of bank bills counted out the sum he had wagered, and which was equal to the debt of Barton Keys.

It was not his money, but what he had found in Soule Ravelle's desk.

But he was reckless now, and to regain his losses suggested another game.

"I brought but little money with me, colonel," said Barton Keys.

"And I have but little with me, sir, but our notes of hand must stand good," was the answer.

"Certainly, sir," was the response, and other games were played, until Colonel Brandt, just released from the galling chain of debt that Soule Ravelle had held upon him, arose from the table a heavy loser to Barton Keys.

CHAPTER XI.

IRVING BRANDT'S PLOT.

WHILE Colonel Brandt was breaking his pledged word to his daughter, gambling with Barton Keys, and getting himself involved in trouble not to be easily shaken off, Maud Brandt was engaged in earnest conversation with her brother.

Irving Brandt had sought his sister's room to talk over with her a plan that he was revolving in his mind, and he found her seated at the window, where she had been for hours, dreaming over the scenes of the past few weeks, and mourning for the lonely man lying in a loathsome jail under sentence of death.

"Irving, I am glad that you have come, for I was in a train of thought that it is best was broken."

"Sit down and let us have a talk together," said Maud, who fairly idolized her noble boy brother.

"Well sis, I have come as I said I would, and I wish to tell you all that I have been thinking about," answered the youth, seating himself by the window and facing his sister.

"Well, brother, what is it?"

"Sis, do you love Bradford Carr?" came the blunt question, and the darkness alone saved the blushes that swept over Maud's face from answering the question.

"Why, Irving, what do you mean?"

"I mean, sis, that I like that tutor of mine immensely, and I am willing to do anything I can to save him."

"And so am I, brother; but I fear nothing can be done."

"Now that is just it, and why I asked you what I did."

"If you love Mr. Carr, I will understand that you are willing to do what I ask of you to save him, for, loving him, you cannot believe him guilty."

"If you do not love him, then you will think all has been done that could be for him, and let the law take its course."

"Why, Irving, you reason like a lawyer, or a lover at least; but what is it you ask of me?"

"You do not wish Carr hanged, do you?"

"Oh, Irving!"

"Well, I do not intend he shall be."

"You do not intend he shall be?"

"No."

"But how can you prevent it?"

"I can, with your aid."

"And how can I aid you?"

"I will tell you, sis."

"Now, my idea is, if Bradford Carr does not die on the gallows, in time he can prove himself innocent of the crime, and what is more, may be able to discover who did murder Soule Ravelle."

"Irving, what are you driving at?"

"Just this, sis."

"If he stays in jail he'll be hanged, and then he will be always looked upon as guilty."

"If he escapes, then he can act."

"If he escapes?" said Maud in a low tone, now thoroughly understanding the drift of her brother's words.

"Yes."

"But how can he escape?"

"Not by his own exertions, sis."

"Who will help him?"

"I will."

"You, Irving?"

"Yes, and one other."

"Who will that be?"

"You, sis."

"Brother!"

"Sister!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can get Bradford Carr out of jail if you will help me."

"But how?"

"Will you help me?"

"Indeed I will, brother mine."

"Just like my good sis that is, so now to tell you my plan."

"I am all attention, Irving."

"I have a plan, and it needs but one thing to make it a success."

"And what is that?"

"The needful."

"The needful, brother?"

"Yes, the dross that rules the world, sis."

"Ah! gold?"

"Yes, money."

"Well?"

"You see my allowance is not enough for luxuries, so I have not saved up much money; but I have a couple of hundred, or so, and I need fully a thousand, and that I wish you to hand over, sis."

"I have only a few hundred in cash, Irving, and what I have is at your service; but I can get more from father in the morning and will do so."

"You dear, good sis, I just knew you would sail to the point, for you never are backward when you can do good."

"Now what is your plan?"

"You have seen the jailer?"

"Yes, Dick Dresden?"

"That's the man; well, if he is not a villain his face belies him."

"Granted, for he has an evil face."

"He may have an honest heart, but I don't believe it, sis."

"At any rate I shall see how true he is to his duty."

"How?"

"I shall offer to bribe him."

"To allow Mr. Carr to escape?"

"That is it."

"And then, Irving?"

"We must lay our plans well, and I'll tell you mine."

"Well, brother?"

"You know the yacht father had built for me?"

"Yes."

"She is a ten-tonner and can be managed by two men, so my plan is to get an old fisherman down the coast here to bring her into the creek near the village."

"He will come in by night, and when Mr. Carr escapes I can take him on board and he can set sail for some distant port."

"It will be thought that the yacht was stolen from Brandt Haven, but we will know better, and keep our own counsel, sis, and as Bradford Carr is a good sailor he can easily reach some port, where he can sell the craft and have the money, for I do not believe he is overburdened with funds."

"Once he is out I intend to secretly hunt down the real murderer of Soule Ravelle, and then, if I find him, all will be well, sis."

"This is a good plan, Irving, and you deserve credit for your heart and head work to save poor Mr. Carr."

"That you may depend upon me for aid you know, and Heaven grant that we be successful."

"I can count on you any time, sis, I know; so I will get to work to-morrow by starting on a fishing expedition with the old fisherman. But instead of fishing, we will run down to Brandt Haven and get the yacht, taking her by night, so that none of the negroes will see us."

"She is already stored, you know, for our cruise after we leave the Blue Anchor; so that part will be all right."

"Then, while Old Jibboom Joe the fisherman hides the Lady Maud in some lagoon, I'll work on the cupidity of Dick Dresden."

"Now, sis, you know my part."

"And a good one it is, Irving; and I will do all in my power to make it successful," was the earnest reply of Maud Brandt.

CHAPTER XII.

MAUD'S RESOLVE.

It was at a late hour the following morning when Colonel Brandt arose, after his night spent in gambling.

He had retired to rest with his brain heated with brandy and his conscience pricking sorely for having fallen when tempted, and allowed himself to be inveigled into a game of cards, which now placed him at the mercy of a man whom he already began to fear.

It was dawn before he fell to sleep, and then his rest was broken by frightful dreams.

At last he awoke with a start, to find Ben, his negro valet, standing by his bedside.

"It is after ten o'clock, massa; and as Missy Maud wants to see you, I thought I'd call you."

"Yes, I'll rise at once," and a sickening sen-

sation came over the colonel as he thought of his night's debauch, and wondered if his daughter had already heard of it.

"Can that fellow have told her?" he muttered, as he sprung out of bed.

Ben usually found his master good-tempered and kind, but upon this particular morning the colonel was in a decided ill-humor, and all went wrong with him.

At last Ben was glad to escape to bring him a cup of coffee and a roll; but the former was drunk, the latter remained untasted, and with a sinking heart Colonel Brandt sought his daughter's room.

He found her looking more cheerful than she had the past few weeks, and the affectionate greeting she gave him showed him that she had not heard of his broken pledge, and he gave a sigh of relief.

"Where is Irving, my child; for the scape-grace keeps so on the move that I hardly see him?" asked the colonel.

"He has gone off with Old Joe Jibboom the fisherman, father, and will be away a day or two."

"I gave him permission, as you were not awake."

"That was right, child, for I slept late."

"Are you well, father, for you look worn this morning?"

"I do not feel very bright, Maud, but the feeling will soon wear off."

"I cannot sleep well from thinking of that poor fellow who is to die."

Maud was silent a moment and then said:

"Father, I have a friend who wishes to get from me for awhile a loan of five hundred dollars, so I must ask you for that sum."

The colonel's face flushed, for he had not one tenth of that sum with him, Barton Keys having pocketed all of his cash, and what he had of Soule Ravelle's the night before.

"This is a strange request, Maud, for any one to make of you."

"It is a just one, father, as I know, though I am not at liberty to explain the circumstances of the case."

"Is it any one at present at the Blue Anchor?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! you received a letter by the mail this morning."

"Yes, father, I received quite a number of letters this morning."

"Well, Maud, my advice is that you do not let any one have this money."

"But I must, father."

"I cannot permit it, my child."

"Father, do you refuse to do this for me?"

"Yes, Maud, for I cannot permit you to be imposed on."

"Father, you have some money of mine which I let you have some days ago, and that I must ask you for, as I cannot disappoint the one who now begs aid of me."

Colonel Brandt was in a quandary.

He had no money and he knew he could not get any unless he borrowed from Keys, a granger, and his pride would not allow him to do that.

Under any other circumstances, he would have willingly let Maud have that which was her own, as it was her individual income, paid her from her inheritance, which she asked him for.

But, penniless, he had to hedge in some way to protect himself, so could do so only by a flat refusal.

"I will not give you your money to throw away, Maud," he said, sternly.

"Father, I am not one to throw money away, as I neither gamble or bet on horse-races," was the stinging reply.

Colonel Brandt shrunk under the shot, and, regretting her words, Maud quickly said:

"Forgive me, father, for I meant not to pain you, especially after your noble promise to me last evening not to play cards any more."

This was a second shot in the bull's-eye, and the colonel fairly shivered, remembering how the noble pledge of the evening before had been almost immediately broken.

"My child, I cannot give you this money, asking it as you do, for some mysterious purpose you care not to make known to me."

"It is not for myself, sir, but for another, and I feel that you should give it to me."

"I cannot."

"Not, after I have just canceled a large indebtedness you owed Mr. Ravelle, and which would have been mine?"

"That has nothing to do with the question at hand, Maud."

"You ask me for a large sum for a purpose I do not care to see you risk it in, and I refuse, so that ends it."

"You know best, father," was the cool reply, and had the colonel dared meet his daughter's eye, he would have seen on her face a look of stern resolve not to be baffled in her determination to get the money.

That this was her decision, her words, as her father left the room, feeling a contempt for himself, proved, for he muttered:

"There is one way in which I can raise the money, and I am resolved to do it."

CHAPTER XIII.

MEG OF THE MAGNOLIAS, THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

THE morning following the painful scene between Maud Brandt and her father, Ellizette came dashing into the room of her young mistress, crying:

"Missy, there is a fortune-teller down on the piazza, and she is just readin' folkses' fortunes same as they was in a book."

Down to the piazza Maud was persuaded to go, and a chorus of voices greeted her from the guests of the Blue Anchor, as young and old gathered around her, asking her to "have her fortune told."

The reader of the future of men and women was a strange character, and Maud gazed upon her with interest, not unmingled with awe.

Her form had once been tall, but was bent with age, and she walked stooping over and with the aid of a long staff, around the top of which was coiled a stuffed rattlesnake of enormous size, holding in its mouth a small red bird.

The face of the woman was darkly bronzed, and upon one cheek was painted a black square, in the center of which was a white skull.

Upon the other was a similar square, in which were the cross-bones, giving her a most hideous aspect.

Her hair was long and white and hung in three braids, one on either side and one down her back.

To the end of these braids was attached the tail of a fox.

Her eyes were black and piercing as she flashed them on those about her, and her attire was a skirt of dressed buckskin, painted in numerous strange and weird devices, while over her shoulders hung a crimson cloak.

About her waist, serving as a girdle, was a chain, to the end of which hung bunches of keys.

"I am Meg of the Magnolias, sweet Lady Maud, and I have the power to read the stars and look into the future of those who would know what is before them in this life," said the old fortune-teller in a cracked voice, addressing Maud as she came up to the group.

"How did you know that my name is Maud?" asked the maiden pleasantly.

"Oh! do not ask me how I know many things it is given me to know, for I cannot tell you."

"I only know that I see in your sweet face traces of late sorrow."

"Those you cared for are dead or in trouble, and more sorrow is to come for you unless you avert it, and it is in your power to do so; but there comes a gallant gentleman of soldier-like bearing."

"Good-morn to you, sir, good-morn, colonel," and Meg of the Magnolias turned to Colonel Brandt, who just then came up.

"Good-morning, my good woman; but from whence do you hail?" said the colonel.

"From anywhere on God's green earth," was the solemn response.

"Well, my lady wanderer, you have the advantage of me, for I do not know you."

"But I know you, Colonel Brandt, and I know your besetting sin as well as I do the many virtues you possess."

"But what availeth many virtues to a man if he hugs to heart one sin to drag him down to ruin?"

"Woman, I like not your way of speaking, and I advise you to keep a more civil tongue between your teeth," angrily said the colonel as he turned away.

"That is the way with mankind—the truth offends them," said Meg of the Magnolias quietly, and catching sight of Chester Granger and Barton Keys, as they walked up to the group, she continued:

"Come, young gentlemen, would you like me to tell your fortune, for I can read the future?"

"No," said Keys quickly.

"Ah! you have not the courage to face the future which I see in store for you, as I can read it now?"

"You are an old humbug," said Keys, greatly annoyed.

"Suppose I prove that I am not by telling you of your past?"

At this both Barton Keys and Chester Granger became annoyed, and the latter said:

"I cannot see how you all tolerate this old hag, let alone encourage her."

Her age at least commands respect, Mr. Granger, and she has certainly done, and said nothing to cause us to censure her," quickly responded Maud, and then turning to the old woman she handed her a piece of gold, with the satirical remark:

"Take this, my good woman, and with it my advice, that you do not speak of others what your art may enable you to read in their hearts, as men wish to cloak their actions from the view of mankind."

"I thank you, Lady Maud, and in return I will say to you to persevere in the path you have chosen to follow and all will be well in the end."

"Come, ladies, come, gentlemen, who wishes to hear what Meg of the Magnolias can tell them of the future?" and she cast her piercing eyes over the group.

But one and all seemed to dread her power

and shrunk back, as though fearing to have her lay bare their past and their future.

With a smile the strange woman waved her hand and went on her way, disappearing in the forest behind the Blue Anchor Inn.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING IN THE PINES.

HARDLY had Meg of the Magnolias disappeared from sight when Ellizette came up to her mistress, where she sat on the piazza, and said:

"Missy, that old woman wants you to take a walk into the pines a little way."

"Who do you mean, Ellizette?"

"The fortune woman."

"Where is she?"

"Gone yonder, missy."

"Where did you see her?"

"I was hanging out your lace shawl on the line, when she called to me as she pass by."

"She said she had something to tell you."

"Very well; I will go," and rising, Maud quietly walked along the front path, and soon came upon the old woman, standing by the roadside and evidently awaiting her.

"You said you had something to say to me, good woman, so my maid told me."

"Yes, sis, I wanted to ask you how you liked my disguise?"

"Irving! Brother!"

"I'm both, sis, and Meg of the Magnolias too."

"Oh, brother!"

"Oh, sister!"

"Who would have thought it was you?"

"Here is the gold piece you gave me, sis, so keep it until you give me the rest, which I will call for to-morrow night, I guess, as I am on my way now to see the jailer."

"But Irving, what possessed you to so disguise yourself?"

"I didn't want Dick Dresden to know me."

"True; but where is the yacht?"

"Old Joe Jibboom has her in the creek."

"You got her without trouble?"

"Cut her out as clean as a whistle, sister Maud."

"You can trust Old Joe?"

"Oh, yes, if I pay him, and I've promised him a hundred dollars, and he helped rig me up in this toggery, giving me the rig he had among a lot of other odds and ends in his cabin, while I painted these elegant designs upon my classic countenance."

"Well, no one would know you, Irving."

"I believe you, sis; but I will go on to the village, and see what I can do with Dresden."

"By to-morrow night I hope we can get Carr free, or by the night after surely, so please have the money for me."

"Irving, I must go to New Orleans to get you the money."

"What, sis?"

"It is true, for father will not give it to me."

"Do you mean it?"

"True, he refuses me, claiming that he fears I may not get it back, for I told him I wanted it for a young friend."

"So you do; but he must give it to you."

"He refuses, and you know his iron will when he makes up his mind not to do a thing."

"Except gambling," slyly put in Irving, who, the reader will imagine, from what he said to the colonel, in his character of Meg of the Magnolias, knew well his father's besetting sin.

"Yes; but father will gamble no more, Irving, for I have his pledge not to."

"Given lately then, sis."

"Yes."

"All right. I'll pray that he keeps it, for it will be setting me a bad example if he keeps on until I get older."

"Sh, Irving, don't talk so; but let me tell you that I must take your yacht to night, and run to New Orleans."

"Oh, sister!"

"It is my only chance to get the money."

"And how can you get it?"

"I shall go to my dear old teacher, Madam Chotard, and she will let me have it."

"If she does not?"

"But she will."

"Should she be absent?"

"Then I will carry my jewels with me, and get a loan on them."

"My brave sister; but how can you get off?"

"I'll pretend to have the dumps, be sick, or anything, and tell Ellizette not to allow a soul to enter my rooms, but to bring my meals up as though I was there."

"Then, to-night I will go the yacht, and have Old Joe run me over to the lake-shore, and thus go to the city, returning to-morrow night, so no one will know that I am away."

"I better go with you, sis."

"No, you remain here to see Dresden, and arrange all your plans; but go by the yacht now, to tell Old Joe to be ready for me, and to get some one to help him sail the craft."

"I will go right to the creek before going to the village, sis, and will be off at once; but we will have to appoint the time the third night from this."

"That will be better, Irving, and find out just what the yacht wants in the way of stores, so that I can get them in New Orleans, for Mr.

Carr had best not touch at any port nearer than the Carolinas, so should go well prepared."

"You have an old head, sis, and a pretty one, on mighty young shoulders; but have you any message to send Mr. Carr?"

Maud flushed at the question, and then said, as she drew a letter from her bosom:

"Yes, if you expect to see him."

"I will see him, sis."

"Then give him this."

"I'll do it; but now I must be off and I'll go to the yacht first thing, and then play Meg of the Magnolias upon Dick Dresden afterward."

"You do not think he will disappoint you?"

"Not with that face, sis; if he does I'll give up the study of human nature," and the youth walked on his way, while Maud returned to her rooms with an anxious and throbbing heart.

CHAPTER XV.

MEG OF THE MAGNOLIAS BEGINS WORK.

THE yacht, Lady Maud, lay in a secluded inlet or creek about a league from the Blue Anchor and thither went Irving Brandt in his disguise to find her.

Old Joe Jibboom was on the alert, and called out as he saw Irving coming:

"Well, old woman, what luck?"

"No one knew me, Joe, not even my sister," answered the youth as he stepped from the low bank upon the yacht's deck.

Old Joe Jibboom was a hardened old seaman, with a face like leather, but with a look of resolution about him that showed he was every inch a man.

His name was known to be Joe, but the Jibboom had been added from the fact that he had been lost overboard one night, and caught at the end of a bowsprit of another vessel and there clung till daybreak through a terrific storm.

He was the fisherman of the Blue Anchor, dwelling in a cove a mile away with only one companion, a youth of sixteen who went by the name of "Joe's Kid."

The Lady Maud was a sloop-yacht, trim as a row-boat, and with a tall, tapering mast and long, needle-like bowsprit that showed she could spread a large area of sail.

She was fitted up with a handsome cabin to contain half a dozen, and with quarters forward for a crew of six.

Colonel Brandt had granted his son's request to have her built, and she was used for a craft to run to and from New Orleans at the pleasure of the Brandt Manor household.

Having told Old Joe to get some one to help him, and be ready to run his sister over to New Orleans, Irving went on his way to the village.

He was met by a few boys who at first seemed disposed to make fun of him, but who, imbued with the superstition of the age, were awed into respect when the supposed woman pointed her long staff at them and said in deep tones:

"Woe be unto the child that jeers at old age."

Thus awed the youngsters fell back, and the supposed Meg of the Magnolias went on into the village.

At the tavern Irving soon gathered a crowd about him, and it was not long before he had collected quite a sum of money from fortune-telling.

Knowing the villagers as he had, from his earliest boyhood, for he was wont to ride over daily to the village, he surprised them with his knowledge of their affairs, and was considered to be indeed one who could read the stars.

Presently Irving saw a priest coming along the street, and stepping out before him he said:

"Father Homer, thy blessing upon a poor old wandering woman."

"God bless you my good woman, and guide your wandering steps to a happy home in which to end thy days," said the good priest in a manner that showed that he meant what he uttered.

"I thank thee, Father Homer, and beg thy acceptance of this offering for charity," and the boy held forth the money paid him by the villagers, who were certainly surprised at the act.

"But, my good woman, I fear you rob yourself."

"Oh no, Father Homer, for I have plenty more, and I beg you to accept it, if only for masses for some poor soul who has not the money to pay for his soul's good."

"I will accept it, good woman, and the prayers of the church will follow thee."

"If distress and poverty overtake you, come to my parish, and you shall find a home there."

"Again bless you, good woman," and the worthy priest went on his way.

This act of charity on the part of the fortune-teller had a good effect with those about her, and the landlord of the tavern at once invited her into the house to have something to eat.

Irving Brandt was a boy with a creditable appetite, and he never refused a good meal, especially such a one as he knew the Boniface of the Magnolia Inn had the name of setting before his guest, so in he went and greatly enjoyed the repast.

"Which way now, good mother?" asked the landlord, as his strange guest arose to depart.

"I will seek the jail, good man, for there is to be found at all times much suffering, and there may be those there to whom I can give consolation by telling them that all is not as bad as it seems for them."

"You have a good heart, woman, and— Ah! there is jailer Dresden now."

"Come in Dick, and have a glass of something, and then take back with you a woman who wishes to read the fortunes of the unfortunates you hold in your keeping."

Dick Dresden was a stout man, with a face that was certainly very unprepossessing.

It was a stern face too, with not one atom of kindness in it, and rumor had it that Dick Dresden had an iron heart.

Sheriff as well as jailer it was his duty to be executioner, when Bradford Carr was led forth to be hanged, and having performed that loathsome duty on several occasions before, he was looked upon as a man to be dreaded, and withal was of considerable importance in the village.

At the invitation of Landlord Lumley, the jailer entered the tap-room, and his eyes fell upon the supposed woman.

"Well, old lady, you are a fortune-teller?" he said gruffly.

"Yes, jailer Dick Dresden, I am," was the reply.

"Ah! you know me?"

"Yes, I know that you gave up the sea to take to keeping a house of misery and hanging folks."

"Ah, Dick, you see she is no falsifier in her art, for she hits us all pretty true."

"She seems to; but she is ugly enough for the figurehead of a buccaneer craft; but come, don't let us quarrel about looks, for I am no beauty, and I know it."

"You wish to see my prisoners, Landlord Lumley says."

"I wish to talk with any that may be in dread of the future, to let them know what is really in store for them."

"She's a good one, Dick, for she gave Father Homer every cent she had collected here, and it was a snug pile too."

Dick Dresden was a good Catholic, and pleased at this act of generosity, he said:

"Well, old lady, you can see my jail-birds, though I have not a choice lot just now."

"There's a boy in for stealing, a woman for burning the house of a neighbor, a negro that is to hang for killing his wife, and a young man that will be strung up for murder before very long."

These are all, and if they are willing to talk with you, you are welcome, and I'll get you to tell me something of my future too, for I don't wish to be jerking souls into eternity at the end of a rope, for the rest of my days."

"Well, we shall see, we shall see, Dick Dresden," was the answer, and the two walked off together toward the jail.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAN WHOSE FACE BELIED HIM.

THE village jail, in which was so much of misery, was not a very formidable structure, though a strong one.

It was a stucco building, large and rambling, having at one time been used as a barracks by French soldiers.

A part of it was in ruins, but another portion had been fitted up for the keeping of those who broken the law.

Dick Dresden the keeper was a bachelor, and was an economical man for the county, as he only required a negro assistant to attend to the duties devolving upon him in the care of prisoners.

The supposed fortune-teller accompanied him to the jail and was ushered into the little sitting-room, while Dick Dresden went the rounds to see who among his prisoners wished to consult Meg of the Magnolias as to their future.

All seemed anxious excepting one, who smiled sadly and said:

"I know my future, Mr. Dresden."

"Better see her, sir."

"No."

"As you please, Mr. Carr; there is no law to make you have your fortune told," and the jailer then led the pretended star reader around to the other cells.

In less than an hour he returned, and with him was the disguised youth.

"Meg of the Magnolias insisted upon seeing you, Mr. Carr, so I took the liberty of bringing her."

Bradford Carr felt annoyed, but he was a gentleman, and seeing the bent form and gray hair of the supposed woman he arose to greet her, his chains clanking as he did so.

"My poor young man, I feel for you in your distress, for I see—yes, I see—" and the disguised youth covered his face with his hands, swayed his body to and fro, and continued in a low tone:

"I see that you are to be murdered."

"That is a hard word, old lady, to call the law's work, for that gentleman was found guilty of murder and sentenced to be hanged, and I

like not to be called a murderer for being so unfortunate as to be the executioner."

"Found guilty? it is not so, for that man is not guilty of the crime!"

"God bless you for those words, my good woman!" cried Bradford Carr, eagerly.

"I see," went on Irving, "I see a crime committed in a pine forest—a man, young, handsome, rich, is shot down by an unknown foe. This man is near, and he is accused of the murder."

"I tell you, Dick Dresden, you will commit murder the day you hang this man," and so fiercely were the words uttered that the jailer said sternly:

"Come, woman, you must go, for I will not hear this said of the law's work."

He drew the pretended woman away, closed the door behind him, and led the way to his own quarters, while Bradford Carr was eagerly reading a note which Irving Brandt had cleverly dropped in the cell.

The note was from Maud, and told him that she believed him innocent, and to have hope, for there was one working hard for his rescue.

Upon the back of the note was written:

"Do not be surprised at anything that occurs, but hold yourself ready for any emergency."

While Bradford Carr was reading over and over again the few lines written him by Maud, and wondering at the meaning of what was in Irving's writing, that remarkably clever youth was talking to the jailer below stairs.

"You must not be angry with me, for the fit was on me, jailer, and I saw what I told you," said Irving.

"I am hurt when one goes against the work of the law, old lady, for that is supposed to do right."

"Yes, but many a one is hanged innocently."

"Yes, such cases have been; but do you think that the prisoner is not guilty?"

"I know it—Wait!"

As Irving spoke he again covered his face with his hands, and rocking to and fro, said in a low voice:

"The murderer of Soule Ravelle wears no chains."

"No one suspects him."

"Bradford Carr is far from his home, his kindred are few, and his friends believe him guilty."

"His hands are not stained with blood, and he should go free."

"I wish you could prove this, old lady—but then it is too late now."

"The truth is, I like Mr. Bradford, for I have found him a perfect gentleman, and he faced his sentence from the judge as coolly as though he was sitting for a portrait, and he don't know what fear is."

"But the jury said he was guilty, the law said he has to die, and the judge passed sentence, and it now only remains for me to hang him, and it will be a sad day for me when I do."

Irving looked at the jailer with surprise.

Had he been mistaken in his man, he wondered?

He must find that out, so he said:

"Well, Dick Dresden, my art tells me that the young man is innocent, and I want to save him, for if I did not, after being warned, I would lose my power."

"You can't save him, woman, though I only wish you could."

"I might, with your help."

"How can I help you?"

"Let him go."

"Do you take me for a fool, old woman?" angrily said the jailer.

"No, I take you for a man with a heart."

"I have a heart, but I know my duty."

"I'd give a thousand dollars to save that poor young man," thoughtfully said Irving.

"You won't give it to me."

"I will."

"I say you won't, for there's no money to buy me to do an act against the law."

Irving saw that the man meant what he said, and not wishing to betray himself, or cause Dick Dresden any suspicion, he said:

"Well, if I had the money, I would give much to free that poor man, for I know that he is not guilty."

"But I can say no more, only you mark my words, some day he will be found to be innocent, and then you'll shrink away from the act you have done."

"Not I, for it will be the law's crime, not mine, if he is hanged and then found innocent."

"I shrink from the work anyway, but I am an officer and I have but to obey orders."

"Do you stay long in these parts, old lady?"

"A day or two, perhaps, but now I must be off."

"I'd give you quarters here, if I could, but it's against orders."

"No, I will go along toward the coast, and some hospitable planter will give me lodging and food, as they have in the past."

"If not, I have money and can buy a bed and something to eat at public houses, or sleep

in the woods if I find none, for, jailer, Meg of the Magnolias has no fear."

"I believe you," was the response of Dick Dresden, as he let Irving out of the gate in the wall that surrounded the jail.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FOOTPAD'S FATE.

UPON leaving the jail, Irving walked along quietly, until he was out of sight of the last house in the village, and then he came to a halt.

It was evident that he was in trouble.

He had expected to be able to free Bradford Carr by bribing the jailer, and he had been disappointed.

The face of Dick Dresden was by no means a prepossessing one, and he did have the look of a man who would very readily accept a bribe.

Irving had his plan all arranged, that should the jailer be afraid to let the prisoner go, and himself remain, that he should accompany him.

But the honesty of the man had withstood temptation, and though the youth could not but admire him for it, he still regretted that he had been beyond bribery in that particular case.

"What am I to do?"

He asked himself this question over and over again, and he was unable to answer it.

"Sis goes to-night to get the money, and she will do her part while I fail in mine."

"I wish I could see her before she goes to tell her the result; but I dare not go back to the Blue Anchor in this rig, even if had time to do so, for it is almost dark now."

"And I could not reach the yacht before she would be off, for sis was to get to the creek, so that Old Joe could set sail just at dark."

"I'm in a fix, that is certain, and I wish I could see my way out of it."

For some time did Irving stand pondering over the unfortunate position he found himself in, and then, as his brow grew stern, he said:

"I have half a mind to return to the jail after dark, cover the jailer with a pistol, and release Mr. Carr."

"But where could he go if he did escape?"

"They would soon run him down."

Walking along slowly, aimlessly in fact, but as though motion would brighten up his thoughts, he suddenly heard steps behind him.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a burly fellow whom he remembered to have seen at the Magnolia Inn.

In a short time the man overtook him and said gruffly:

"Which way, old woman?"

"My steps lead me the right way, man," was the answer.

"Well, I'd like to know how mine are going to lead me through life," he said rudely.

Irving could not resist the words.

"From your looks I think they'll lead you to the gallows."

The fellow had devil in his eye, and recklessness stamped upon every feature of his face.

He was a large man, dressed half in sailor garb, half landsman, and had the look of one who would cut a throat without regret at the act.

Irving was suspicious of him, for he wondered why he was going in that direction, as there was no house within a mile where such as he could possibly live.

He had seen the man watching him closely at the inn, and he now had an idea that he had come to seek him for no good purpose.

"If you are the reader of the fortune you say you are, you can just read for me my destiny, old woman," said the man, stepping directly in front of Irving.

"I have no time now."

"You must take time," was the rude response.

"Stand out of my way, young man, for I would pass," said Irving firmly.

"Not I, for I demand toll, old woman."

"Toll?"

"Yes, and you've got the gold and plenty of it, or you'd never have given that money to the priest to-day."

"Do you mean to rob me?"

"I do."

"You dare not."

"Come, old woman, out with your gold, for if you do not, I'll knock you in the head and take it."

"You would not kill me?" and Irving spoke pleadingly.

"I'll do it sure, if you do not obey me, so out with your gold."

"Go, man, and do not dare me."

"Bah! you and your snake staff cannot scare me, as you shall see."

"Come, once more, I tell you to give up your gold, or I'll take your life."

Irving shook his head, and with an oath the footpad sprung toward him a knife in his hand.

The disguised youth stepped quickly backward to avoid him, but the man was determined upon robbery, if he had to commit murder to gain his ends, and he rushed upon Irving now with savage face and knife uplifted, while he cried in a hoarse voice:

"I'll take your life, old woman, and your gold too."

But suddenly a sharp report rung out, and with a groan the footpad fell forward upon his face, burying the blade of his knife, which he still clutched, deep into the ground.

"Curses! you hag of Satan, you have done for me!"

"Quick! run for a doctor at the village, and—"

The man gasped, as he struggled in his agony, and sunk in a heap at the feet of the boy.

"He is dead," cried Irving, aghast with horror.

It was the first time he had ever turned a weapon upon a human being, and it cut him to the quick to see the man die.

"I had to do it, or he would have killed me," he said as the tears came into his eyes.

Then he looked about him to see if any one had seen the act.

But not a human being was near, and Irving said:

"If I was not in this disguise I would go and tell what I have done; but I dare not do it now, for they might put me in prison, and then Mr. Carr would be hanged."

"Oh, what shall I do to save him?"

Just then his gaze fell again upon the robber, and he hastened away from the fatal spot, anxious to leave it far behind him in the gathering shades of night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PALAFIX THE PIRATE.

SOME leagues down the coast from the Blue Anchor, there was a heavy forest, interspersed with lagoons that formed a perfect net-work of land and water for the distance of several miles into the interior.

No planter had been hardy enough to seek to till the soil in that neighborhood, and no living being was supposed to dwell there, though strange tales were told of pirates who had their haunts there in other days, and men said that strange, rakish-looking craft were sometimes even then seen sailing in toward the shores of the Dismal Forest, as the place was called, and becoming lost to sight in the labyrinth of the lagoons.

Be this as it may, as regarded the truth of the reports, it is certain that none of these free rovers of the coast, if such had their abiding-place in the Dismal Forest, ever molested the plantations along the shores of the sound, and hence no warfare had ever been waged against that region.

But into that desolate, dreary region I would have my reader accompany me, that I may present to him a scene not visible to the dwellers along the coast, except in rare cases.

Upon a piece of land rising above the level country about it, to a height of twenty feet perhaps and so surrounded by lagoons as to be called an island, was a hut almost hidden from view by large trees, from which drooped in huge festoons masses of the somber Spanish moss so common in that far southern land.

The cot, or cabin, was built of the bark of trees, was of good size, for it contained several rooms, and within was by no means uncomfortable.

The floor was boarded and covered with a carpet, or matting, of dry grass, evidently home-made.

The furniture of the cot was from a ship's cabin evidently, and neatly arranged, made the larger room look cosy and inviting.

The other two rooms were smaller, and ships' bunks upon either side showed that they were used as sleeping-apartments by the occupants of the secluded place.

Boats were drawn up on the shore, one a large barge, the other a light skiff, while out in the stream at anchor were a small sloop of trim build, and a cat-rigged sail-boat.

Before the door of the cabin sat a man in seaman's garb busily engaged in carving a tiller and doing his work in an artistic manner that showed skill in the use of his knife.

He was a man of forty perhaps, with a firmly-knit frame and a face that was utterly fearless, bold and determined.

His features were strongly-cut and he had a certain air of dash about him that was attractive in its don't-care-for-consequences sort of look.

As he worked at his tiller carving he supported one foot upon a stool, and the bandage about it showed that he had been wounded or had met with an accident in some way.

The splash of oars attracting his attention, he glanced up quickly and discovered a light skiff coming up the lagoon and fairly flying over the waters.

In it sat a young girl, bending to the oars with a grace and strength that are seldom combined, and which sent the boat along at a pace that was remarkable.

She headed in for the shore where were the other boats, and leaping out, walked rapidly up the slight hill toward the cabin.

She was a girl of scarcely more than thirteen, but had a form that was already budding into womanhood under the influence of the warm clime in which she dwelt.

Every motion was one of grace and she certainly was possessed of an exquisite figure,

while her face was one of rare beauty, her eyes being as blue as indigo and shaded by long lashes that toned down the fire that dwelt in them.

Her face was as brown as a hazel-nut, but tinted with health, and her features were expressive in the extreme.

She was dressed in a blue frock of fine texture and wore shoes a lady of wealth might have been proud of, both for quality and size.

As she advanced toward the cot, the man called out:

"Well, Myrtle, what hurries you so?"

"A sail-boat stood into the outer lagoon, father, and its occupant then took to his oars and headed up toward our island."

"Ah! this is strange, for I am expecting no messenger and I hope no accident has befallen the lugger."

"I do not know the boat, father, so hastened on to tell you."

"You did right, Myrtle; but how many were in the boat?"

"I saw but one, but her sides are high, and others might be lying down in her."

"True; we do not fear one man, nor two, and might give even more a warm reception; but I am crippled by this wounded leg and you will have to help in the fighting if we are pressed, Myrtle, for Palafox the Pirate, as men call me, is not to be taken alive."

"No, father, for they would be certain to hang you; but I will get the guns ready, while you watch for the boat to appear around the bend."

Hardly had the girl disappeared in the cabin, when she was called back.

"Come, Myrtle, for there comes the boat, and it is a friend, not a foe, that we have to welcome."

"Oh! it is Irving Brandt," cried Myrtle, with real pleasure, and she bounded toward the shore to meet the incoming boat, while the man muttered:

"I wonder if the planter's son will not some day wed Palafox the Pirate's daughter!"

CHAPTER XIX.

IRVING BRANDT STARTS ON A MYSTERIOUS CRUISE.

As Irving Brandt walked along through the pines, after his adventure with the footpad, he suddenly stopped short, stood an instant as though a thought had flashed through his mind, and then said, quickly moving forward as he did so:

"I will do it."

A brisk walk of a few miles through the gloomy forest brought him out upon the beach, with the waters of the Sound before him.

Hastening along the shore he soon came to a point of land where stood an humble log cabin built of pine logs.

All was darkness within and without, but the growl of a dog showed him that a four-footed sentinel was on the watch.

"Down, Catfish!" he said, sternly, to the huge brute as he came bounding toward him.

The dog seemed to recognize the voice but not the attire, and still came on threateningly.

"Here, Catfish, old fellow, don't you know me in this rig?" said Irving; and now the vicious animal with the fishy and feline name came up to the youth with a yelp of welcome.

"Nobody at home, Catfish?" said Irving, as he walked up to the cabin door.

Putting his hand upon a log he took down a key, with the remark:

"Sandy has gone out fishing, and I am glad of it, for I did not exactly know how to explain this costume to him; but I'll soon change it, and be off."

Entering the cabin, he hunted around in the darkness until he found a lamp, and this he soon lighted, when the interior was revealed.

It looked more like the cabin of a ship than a house on shore, for several bunks were against one wall, and the entire furniture was of a marine order.

In one corner of the room was a box, which Irving opened, and taking therefrom a bundle of clothing, he hastily began to disrobe himself of his feminine attire, and replace it with his own, for his disguise as Meg of the Magnolias had been made up in the cabin of the fisherman, which was the home of old Joe Jibboom.

Having washed off the paint and put on his own clothes, Irving left the cabin, locked the door and replaced the key where he had found it.

Then he walked down toward the shore, Catfish following the while close at his heels.

Several boats were drawn out upon the sand, and selecting one of these, with a leg-of-mutton sail, he shoved it into the water and sprang in.

"Good-by, Catfish," he called out as he spread his little sail and glided away before a light breeze.

He seemed to know his course, however, for after rounding a point of land he held on down the coast toward the Dismal Forest.

His quick eye soon sighted a boat ahead, and after a close scrutiny of it, he held on his way, which would bring him across its bows.

"Ho, the boat!" called out a voice from the stranger.

"Ho, Sandy, is that you?" answered Irving.

"Yes, Master Irving, but what are you doing out here so late at night?" and the two boats were now luffed up near each other.

"Cruising round, Sandy."

"Better not go further down toward the Dismal Forest, Master Irving, for you may get picked up."

"By whom?"

"Pirates."

"Bah! do you believe there are any pirates there, Sandy?"

"I do, Master Irving."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, sir, I fish about here often of nights, you know, and I see craft heading in and out now and then that don't look honest."

"Boats going up the coast, Sandy?"

"No, sir, for they wouldn't stand in to the Dismal to do that."

"Well, I'll be careful, Sandy; but what luck have you had?"

"Pretty good, sir, and I was doing well when I saw a light in the cabin, and knowing that Captain Joe was not there I thought I'd run in and see about it."

"I was there, Sandy, and I have borrowed one of your boats."

"You have the right to, sir, I am sure, for Captain Joe would do anything for you, Master Irving."

"As I would for Captain Joe, Sandy, or you; but do you go with your fish to the Blue Anchor?"

"Yes, sir, as soon as it is dawn."

"Do not speak of seeing me, Sandy."

"No, sir."

"Good-night," and Irving sailed on his way, while Sandy, the overgrown youth, who was Old Joe Jibboom's assistant, called out:

"Don't go too near the Dismal, Master Sandy."

"All right, Sandy," the boy called out, and he headed out into the sound; but once out of sight of the other boat he again changed his course and pointed directly for the Dismal Forest.

CHAPTER XX.

A PIRATE'S PROMISE.

THE single occupant of the boat seen by Myrtle Palafox was indeed Irving Brandt.

He had reached the lagoons shortly after sunrise, and stood boldly into the larger one, lowering his sail and taking to his oars when the moss clad trees shut off wholly the wind.

With his face to the bow, and rowing as he sat thus, the better to find his way, he moved slowly along, evidently not perfectly familiar with his surroundings, and trusting to memory, for now and then he would come to a stop at some branching lagoon, as though to refresh remembrance as to his course.

In this way he continued until at last he came in sight of the higher land, with the cabin upon it.

"I am right," he said eagerly, and a few vigorous strokes of the oar sent the boat ashore.

As he landed he was met by Myrtle, who stretched forth her hand and said warmly: "I am so glad to see you, Master Irving, and father will be too, for this is an unexpected pleasure, your visiting us."

She spoke with the easy grace of a woman of the world, and little like what might have been expected of one who dwelt in such somber isolation and solitude.

"And I am glad to see you again, Myrtle; but I have come on a visit to your father, and I am glad to find him at home," and Irving walked along with the girl toward the cabin.

"Ho, Master Irving! you've got a good head to pilot yourself up to my cabin; but you are welcome, I assure you, and how are you?" called out the man, extending his hand and rising on one foot.

"I am well, Captain Palafox, but sorry to see you crippled. What is the matter?" and Irving took a seat which Myrtle brought from the cabin for him.

"A pistol-shot wound only, sir," but it's about well, I am glad to say, for I do not like being cooped up."

"I am lucky to find you at home, captain, for I heard you would not be."

"I would have been off in the lugger with the lads, Master Irving, had it not been for this wounded foot; but this is an unexpected honor, your coming to see me."

"I came to ask a favor of you, captain."

"It is granted, of course; but how can the Sea Fox serve Master Irving Brandt?" and there was just a tinge of sarcasm in the tone of the pirate.

This Irving detected, and he said quickly:

"It is in your power to serve me well, and it is in my power to pay you well for the work."

"Master Irving, don't talk of pay to me, for already do I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"Do not speak of that, captain, for it is past, and—"

"It is past, yes, but it is not forgotten."

"No, I have not forgotten how you picked up,

one moonlight night, an open boat, in which were that girl and myself.

"I was in irons, hand and foot, and both of us were half starved—for we had had nothing to eat since Myrtle had bribed the two sailors who were guarding me to let our boat go adrift in the night."

"She gave these men jewels worth a king's ransom, let alone the life of a pirate, and then she tried hard to bring the boat to the lagoon."

"But, as ill-fortune had it— Hold, Master Brandt, let me draw the picture again for you, to show you that the Sea Fox has a memory that extends to his heart."

"Yes, as I was saying, the boat had but one oar and no sail; but Myrtle there sculled it all through the night until her hands were blistered and bleeding."

"Then dawn came to find no land in sight, and thank Heaven, no vessel near."

"All that day we drifted, with nothing to eat or drink, and I in irons, unable to do one thing."

"Night came on, Master Irving, and just at sunset we had sighted land."

"Some hours after, in the moonlight, we descried a sailboat."

"It bore down toward us, and you were its occupant, and alone."

"You were heading in toward the grand old home where you lived; but your eyes sighted the drifting boat, and you came down to us."

"You saw us as we were, half-starved and suffering, and Myrtle begged you not to take her father ashore to be hanged."

"You had a heart, Master Irving, and though I told you I was Palafox the Sea Fox, on whose head was set a price as smuggler and pirate, you said right out, that you sought no empty honor of capturing a man in irons, and that you would take me to my home."

"More, you said that the secret you then found out you would not betray."

"You anchored out our little boat, went to your home and made an excuse to be absent for some time, returned, and brought us to this very spot."

"But my wounds and my sufferings had brought on a fever, and I nearly died, as you know; but you cared for me most kindly, and then, with the respect and love of my band, you departed for your home, and well we know, that though a year has passed since then, not one word have you uttered to betray us, though your coming now shows you know well our haunts."

"Then, Master Irving, I made you a promise, and I still remember it, for I said that if ever the world went wrong with you, if ever you needed the service of a friend upon whom you could depend, pirate though he may be, you should come to Palafox the Sea Fox, and find one who would shed his blood for you."

"Now, Master Irving, as you see that my promise is remembered, tell me how I can serve you."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CHASE OF THE LADY MAUD.

IT had been the intention of Old Joe Jibboom to take Sandy along with him as an assistant in working the Lady Maud, but, after thinking the matter over, he said to himself:

"The boy is such a stickler for truth and honesty that if he was questioned on the matter he'd let out the fact that Miss Maud had gone to New Orleans, and that, Master Irving says, she don't wish known."

"No, the yacht handles like a cat-rig, and I can work her alone; if not, Miss Maud can give me a hand, for she's better than half the men sailors on the coast."

"Yes, I'll leave Sandy alone to do the fishing for the Blue Anchor, so that my going won't attract attention."

In the mean time Maud was laying her plans to get away unobserved, and in this her faithful maid, Ellizette, was aiding her.

The quadroon girl had surreptitiously taken to the woods and hidden a small hand-sack for her mistress, and then let her know just when all the guests went in to tea.

Then Maud quietly slipped out of the house and reached the pines unseen, while Ellizette remained to stand guard at the door of her mistress's rooms to ward off all inquiries, a duty which the bright quadroon was well suited for.

A walk through the gathering gloom of the forest brought Maud to the spot where Irving had told her Captain Joe would await her, and there she found him on hand promptly.

"Well, Captain Joe, we are to have a voyage together, I believe?" said Maud, who had often met the old fisherman and sailed with him.

"Yes, Lady Maud, so Master Irving told me, and we'll get off at once, for it is dark now; but I didn't get any one to help me, as the young master said this was to be a secret run, and I wasn't sure I could trust my boy, Sandy, or anybody else, so if it comes to it, you won't mind giving me a helping hand, I hopes?"

"No, indeed, Captain Joe. I will be only too glad to play captain, mate or crew, just as you desire."

"Thankee, Lady Maud, and we'll be off at once."

The yacht was soon reached, securely hidden away in a basin, and the old fisherman soon had her dropping down the creek into the Sound.

Once free of the land-locked waters, and the Lady Maud went swiftly along under pressure of a fair breeze, laying her course for New Orleans by the way of the lake port of entry.

A rapid run brought Maud to the city early on the following morning, and her first duty was to seek the school which she had so long attended and ask Madam Chotard for the sum of money which she needed for the use of Irving in freeing Bradford Carr from prison.

She met with a warm welcome from the madam, who had always regarded Maud as her favorite pupil, and without hesitancy she loaned her the required sum, without asking why she had sought her instead of her father to get it, for she accepted the maiden's word that it was for a good purpose, which she cared not to have known.

Thus successful, Maud hastened by carriage to the lake shore, and found Captain Joe patiently awaiting her.

It was yet some time to sunset, but anxious to reach the Blue Anchor under cover of the night, if possible, or early in the morning, so that if seen she would appear to have been out for a walk only, Maud at once determined to be off, and it was but a few moments before the pretty craft was sailing merrily along over the waters of the lake.

Darkness found her well on her way; but then the breeze dropped to very light, and Captain Joe cast anxious glances up to windward when he had caught sight of a strange sail.

"This is provoking, Captain Joe," said Maud, alluding to the dying out of the wind.

"We'll get it stiff from another quarter afore long, Lady Maud," answered Joe, who always gave the maiden the title which Irving had bestowed upon his yacht.

"It will come in from the southward," said Maud, glancing in that direction.

"Yes, miss, and be in our favor, so that we can make a rapid run."

"Is not that a sail off there, Captain Joe?" asked Maud, who, in glancing in the direction of the expected wind, had caught sight of the strange sail.

"It does look like a vessel," answered Captain Joe innocently.

"It is coming down toward us, too, so she must have a breeze."

"Yes, miss, we'll get it soon."

"No, Captain Joe, yonder craft is coming under pressure of her sweeps and not her sails," cried Maud.

"Is she, miss?" and Old Joe tried to look as though he had not known this fact for the past twenty minutes.

"Yes, she is."

"So she is, Lady Maud."

"What is she?"

"A lugger, miss."

"I can see that, but what do you make her out?"

"A coaster, doubtless, Lady Maud."

"I hope she is no worse."

"I hope so, too, Lady Maud."

"You know there are pirates in these waters, Captain Joe."

"Yes, miss, so they say."

"I hope she may be an honest craft."

"I pray so, too, miss."

"But she looks suspicious coming down to us under sweeps— There! is not that a puff of wind?"

"Yes, miss; we'll get it soon."

"The Lady Maud is moving now."

"Yes, miss."

"But the lugger gains."

"It does look a little that way."

"She gains rapidly; so fall off as well as you can, and see if she still heads for us, and then we shall know whether she is on her course or in chase of us."

Captain Joe did as directed, and both watched the result anxiously.

The Lady Maud was going along at about two knots to the hour only, and the lugger, under pressure of her huge sweeps, which were worked with great regularity, was making, perhaps, three knots, so that she was gaining well when the yacht changed her course.

But hardly had the yacht taken another course when the lugger's bow was seen to change, too, and point for her.

"They are in chase of us, Captain Joe," said Maud calmly.

"Yes, miss, it does seem as though the Lady Maud is the game they are after," responded the old fisherman, in a voice that plainly showed now his anxiety.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PREY OF THE DEVIL-FISH.

IT was but a few moments, after the course of the Lady Maud was changed, before both of those on her decks saw that the lugger was rapidly overhauling her.

"What can we do, Captain Joe, for that lugger has the look of a pirate?" said Maud calmly, although her brain was in a whirl and her heart throbbing with excitement.

"We can't do anything, Lady Maud, seeing

as we haven't got any sweeps, and no one to work even if we had."

"And cannot defend ourselves?"

"No, miss, for though I'd fight to the death for you, what could I do against that fellow if he is a pirate?"

"And you think he is?"

"I fear so."

"I hope that it is Palafox the Pirate, if it is an outlaw."

"You mean the Sea Fox, as we call him?"

"Yes."

"Why him, Lady Maud?"

"Well, he has the name of being a gentleman, in the treatment of his lady captives, however severe he may be with men."

"Yes, miss, I have heard that of him, and they say too he was a gentleman born, but took to pirating for the pleasure he found in a wild life."

"And have you heard that he was cruel?"

"He shuns all fights, miss, I have heard, that he can; but fights like a devil if he is forced to, and his numerous escapes have gotten for him the name of the Sea Fox; but I never heard of his treating a woman hard," said Captain Joe.

"There are other pirates that do, Captain Joe."

"Yes, Lady Maud; but that is a coast buccancer, or smuggler, if an outlaw."

"Why do you think so?"

"You see he has a lugger, when if he was a wide wave pirate he would have a trim schooner or brig, for that craft would not dare run out of a land haven in these times when cruisers are around."

"Well, whatever the craft is, or whoever her commander may be, we will soon be taken," sadly said Maud.

"Yes, miss; but if a wind only would come, this craft has lightning heels, and could soon show 'em to that lugger."

"See, she's walking across our bows and means to have her way with us."

The stranger was a small lugger, of a kind frequently found along the Gulf coast, and used for any purpose, from a planter's pleasure craft to a cotton carrier.

She had rather taller masts than was usual with that class of boats, and her spread of canvas was considerably larger than luggers were wont to carry, which, together with the number of sweeps she had out, gave her a suspicious look, even had not the manner in which she had dogged the Lady Maud excited dread of her.

Maud's position was certainly a perilous one.

With only Old Joe as a protector, she knew that she was at the mercy of whoever was on the lugger.

She had gone to New Orleans to get a certain sum of money, and this she had with her, together with a quantity of jewels which she had carried with her to raise the amount on, if she did not receive it from Madam Chotard.

If captured and robbed, what would become of poor Bradford Carr she wondered, and the thought was most distressing to her, for she expected that Irving would depend wholly upon her.

But she was a brave girl, and though pale and fearful, was determined to meet the alternative calmly.

As she stood eying the coming lugger, through a glass, she saw that there were quite a number of men upon her decks, and she was about to make known to Captain Joe her discovery, when there came sternly across the waters:

"Ho that sloop!"

"Ay, ay; that lugger," answered back Captain Joe, while he added:

"I answer as I'm hailed, Lady Maud."

"What sloop is that?"

"The Lady of the Lake," responded Captain Joe with a chuckle.

"Where from?"

"Orleans."

"Where bound?"

"Home."

"Where is your home?"

"On the coast."

"Sirrah, I'll stand no trifling."

"I ask you where you are bound?" demanded the lugger commander.

"To the Sound coast."

"Ay, ay, what freight?"

"None."

"Who have you on board?"

"There are but two us."

"I do not believe you."

"Stand by, lads, to follow me on board that craft."

"Way 'nough! ship your starboard sweeps! Cast grapnels!"

"Follow me!"

These orders were quickly given, and in a voice that was distinctly heard by Maud and Captain Joe.

In obedience the port sweeps were shipped, and the grapnels thrown as the two vessels came together with a slight shock, for seeing that the lugger was coming alongside, Captain Joe had luffed up to meet him and prevent damage.

Then upon the yacht's deck sprang a young seaman, a cutlass in his hand, and at his back

were a score of men, while as many more were on the lugger.

"I claim this craft as the prize of the Devil Fish," called out the leader of the boarders, and he advanced aft, seemingly expecting resistance.

There stood Maud and Captain Joe quietly awaiting him.

The young freebooter stopped, looked about him with surprise, and seeing a female raised his hat, while he said:

"Pardon, lady, I meant not to shock you; but the ways of we freebooters are a trifle rough."

"May I ask where is the crew of this craft?"

"You see here, sir, all there were on board," said Maud quietly.

"I told you there were but two of us," added Captain Joe.

"Is there some trick in this? Are we to expect a prize?" and the young freebooter seemed bewildered.

"There is no trick, sir, and no surprise intended."

"I am returning to my home, and this sailor is all there is on board to man the yacht."

"I am sorry, lady, but I must claim this pretty craft as a prize, for it is just what we need, and you I will hold for ransom."

"But have no fear that you will have to face danger or rudeness, for your cabin shall be wholly at your service."

"I thank you, sir, for at least this kindness, and I would ask what vessel this is and what name you sail under?"

"As for my name, lady, it matters not, for what's in a name! but this vessel has the rather strange appellation of the Devil Fish."

"I have heard of such a craft, sir."

"And so have I, and never any good of her," growled Captain Joe.

"Ah, my man, your remark reminds me of your presence, and you will have to be placed in safety."

"Put him in irons, lads, and then half of you return to the lugger, and follow this craft, for I will take charge of her."

The orders of the young sea-rover were obeyed, Captain Joe finding himself thrust below-decks and heavily ironed, which caused him to mutter:

"I should have kept my mouth shut."

Then the grapnels were cast loose, and while Maud retired to her cabin, wondering what was to follow, the two vessels got under way, and under a stiff breeze that was now blowing, but too late to save the Lady Maud, they headed down the coast, the lugger showing remarkably good sailing qualities.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PIRATE'S ROMANCE.

WHEN Captain Palafox, the Sea Fox, after proving to Irving Brandt that he was not a man to forget a favor done him, asked how he could serve him, the youth remained silent, as though lost in deep thought.

He knew that Palafox had been for years noted as a pirate whom the law could not lay hands upon.

A reward had been offered for him dead or alive, but still the rover remained at large, and his escapes had been so numerous and wonderful that he had well deserved the name of the Sea Fox.

Irving knew that he was also a smuggler, and that he was a man who ought to be captured.

But then the youth had a high sense of honor. He had picked the pirate and his daughter up at sea, as Palafox had stated, and he felt that he had no right to refuse the appeal of Myrtle.

Deeply interested in the man, and pitying, and drawn toward the little girl, he had done all in his power for them, and their secret he had faithfully kept, and intended to keep, as long as the buccaneers did not strike at the dwellers along the coast.

Now he had boldly invaded the haunt of the pirates, and it was for a purpose which he hesitated to make known.

While hesitating to break his object in coming to the chief, he led off with the remark:

"Captain, why is it that such a good fellow as you are will be a pirate?"

Irving half expected some sad story of love and crime in response to his question, but instead the pirate said coolly:

"I will tell you, Master Irving, why I am an outlaw if you would like to know."

"I should like to know."

"Well, the truth is, I was brought up for a profession, but my father sent me to sea to get the wildness out of me, as I was sowing wild oats ashore at a great rate."

"He smuggled me on board a fine brig which he owned, and when out at sea coolly told me that he was to return in the pilot boat, while I was to go on a voyage to the East Indies."

"Master Irving, it was a stunner to me, for I had lots of friends ashore and I had been wild, gambling and horse-racing, until I had become involved heavily in debt."

"My father had refused to give me the money, although I promised repentance, and thus took the reins in his own hand, and I was sent off, a young man of twenty-one, without a word of regret or farewell."

"I stormed, but it did no good, for back went my father into the pilot-boat, while I remained on board in irons."

"Well, the captain was a hyena, and he began hard work with me, for I was put before the mast and beat around until I could not stand it."

"The lads felt sorry for me and I told them that my father was rich, owned a number of vessels, and that the loss of one would not hurt him, while I would take the brig for my share of my inheritance, and let my brother and sister have all the rest."

"The crew listened to my reasoning and we just took charge of the brig."

"The captain, his mates and several of the men who did not care to join us, we just put ashore at the nearest port and I became captain."

"Since then I have knocked about the seas as a rover and am the football of Fate."

"But, Master Irving, I forgot to tell you that I had secretly married a young and beautiful girl before I left home and I did not see her again for years."

"But one night I went to my home quietly and in disguise and found my young wife still hoping for my return."

"She was true to me, sinner though I was, and she came with me in my vessel and cruised with me for years."

"Myrtle there was born at sea, and two years after her birth her mother was washed overboard one night of a storm, and my little girl is all I have left now."

"She knows me as I am, that I am a hunted man, but she loves me and I am raising up a fortune for her to be happy with some day."

"Now, Master Irving, you know why I turned pirate, and I remain so simply because I have no other calling, and what is more, I like the wild life of danger I lead."

"But you did not tell me how I could serve you?"

Irving had listened most attentively to the pirate's story; but, brought back to the object of his visit by the question, he said:

"I am not sure that you will care to do what I ask you."

"Try me."

"It is a great deal for me to ask."

"And you did a great deal for me."

"Well, I will tell you just what I wish you to help me in."

"Been gambling and gotten in too deep for the old gentleman to help you out?"

"Oh, no," cried Irving.

"Well, if you want money, you have but to say so, for I have the gold in any sum you need and you had better get it from me than owe debts to others who thereby become your master."

"Ah, Captain Palafox, you misunderstand me, for I never play cards, and I do not owe a dollar in the world."

"Then tell me what I can do for you," and the pirate smiled pleasantly and it encouraged Irving to speak out:

CHAPTER XXIV.

IRVING BRANDT'S BOLD GAME.

"CAPTAIN PALAFOX," began Irving Brandt hesitatingly:

"If one you loved was in danger would you not do much to save him?"

"Just you get in danger, Master Irving, and see the chances I'd take to pull you through," was the ready response.

"But I am not in danger."

"Who then?"

"One I care much for."

"What is her name?"

"It is not a lady," and Irving blushed.

"Ah! a man?"

"Yes."

"Tell your story."

"Well, sir, when North my father's life was saved by a young man, and he being a teacher he came South as my tutor."

"Father wished to serve him in some way, you know, and as he would not accept money he took this way to do it, while I also needed a private teacher."

"That young man went with our family to the Blue Anchor Inn, on the Sound—"

"I know it so well that I ran off a West Indian pirate who intended to descend upon the place some weeks ago, thinking he would get a rich haul from the guests."

"But I headed him off, told him that this was my cruising-ground and as I never touched home-folks I would not let others do so."

"He beat to quarters, ran his guns out, and said he would do as he pleased."

"But I was firm, Master Irving, and Captain Jake Curtis did not lose his guests, and they did not lose their liberty and their jewels, for the fellow would have held them for ransom."

"You have saved us all well, captain."

"Oh, yes, I will do all I can for the dwellers along this coast and won't allow others to harm them, but continue with your story."

"Well, sir, this young man went with us to the Blue Anchor and there were those there who were jealous of him; at least, one of the planter

guests. A young man of wealth from the Mississippi river coast country, was killed, how no one really knows, and my tutor was found by him and accused of the murder."

"Did he kill him?"

"It was so decided by a jury."

"Juries are great liars at times, Master Irving, but what motive had he?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, they said that Mr. Carr—"

"Your tutor?"

"Yes, Bradford Carr."

"Well?"

"They said that he loved my sister—"

"No one could blame him for that, Master Irving, for I have seen her."

"You have seen her?"

"Oh, yes, quite often."

"But where?"

"Never mind now, but go on, for your story holds interest for me and I see that Myrtle is drinking it all in too."

"The reason for his killing Soule Ravelle, they said, was because he loved sister Maud, who was engaged to the young planter."

"Ah! she did not love the poor tutor?"

"Well, she was pledged by father and Planter Ravelle to marry Soule and that was the way of it."

"And they say young Carr killed Ravelle because he was jealous of him?"

"Yes."

"But what proof had they?"

"As I said, he was found by the body, and his pistol was lying near."

"This looks bad."

"Yes, but he was found, and so was the pistol, by two young men I do not like or trust, and I believe that they took advantage of Bradford Carr's accidentally being there to make all they could against it."

"There was also found a letter on Soule Ravelle's body, signed by Carr, asking him to meet him on the spot where his body was found."

"What said Bradford Carr to this?"

"He said he had reached the body a moment before Chester Granger came up, and the letter he says is a forgery."

"I believe him; and I have closely examined the letter and Mr. Carr's writing, and I feel that he tells the truth."

"But the case went against him?"

"It did."

"And he was sentenced?"

"Yes."

"To be hanged?"

"Yes, Captain Palafox."

"When?"

"The time is almost up."

"And you believe him innocent?"

"I know it."

"And your sister?"

"Believes as I do."

"And your father?"

"He fears that he is guilty, as do others."

"And he must die on the gallows, innocent or guilty?"

"That is just what I wish to prevent."

"How can you?"

"Well, I tried to bribe the jailer, but though the fellow looked like a man who could be bought, I could not move him."

"Looks are often deceitful, Master Irving."

"I begin to think so."

"You will know so before you reach my age; but what did you do next?"

"I came to see you."

"Ah!"

"Yes, a happy thought struck me that you would aid me."

"You see, I could not get the money I needed to bribe the jailer, so sister Maud sailed in my yacht to New Orleans to borrow it, or raise it on her jewels—you see I tell you all."

"That is right; and she is a noble girl."

"But she had gone when I found out that bribery would do no good, so I took a boat and ran down to see you."

"That was right, Master Irving."

"And I can help me?"

"What would you have me do?"

"I can pilot you to a place near the jail, and you can land with some of your men by night, and I will get the jailer to open the gate, when we can seize him and release the prisoner."

"You have planned well, Master Irving."

"But the jailer must not be harmed."

"I understand; and that was just the plan I had formed to save the young man."

"The plan you had formed?" asked Irving, in surprise.

"Yes, for to tell you the truth, I was at the trial."

"You?"

"Yes; business called me to the village, and I went there in disguise."

"I heard the whole trial, and felt certain that Bradford Carr was not guilty, so made up my mind to save him before execution day."

"This was noble of you, Captain Palafox."

"Well, I hated to see him die for a crime I do not believe he committed, so you see I grant you no favor after all, Master Irving," and the pirate captain laughed lightly, while Irving Brandt was filled with surprise.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PIRATE'S PLAN.

"Now, Master Irving, you see I had already decided to do just what you wished of me," said the pirate, after the youth had expressed his surprise at the circumstance.

"Yes, so you have."

"And I am not doing you any favor after all?"

"Oh, yes you are, and I believed that you would aid me, and hence I came to you as I did."

"You were right, and I tell you now, Master Irving, and mean every word I say, that when Palafox can do you a service, just command him, whether it is gold you want or anything else."

"I sincerely thank you, sir."

"Do not thank me; but now, Myrtle, fix us up some dinner, while Master Irving and I talk over our little plan."

The young girl withdrew into the cabin, while the pirate and Irving at once began talking over their plan of action.

"You say that you were at the trial?" asked Irving.

"Yes."

"I should think you would fear to trust yourself there, for there must be many in the village who have seen you."

"Oh, yes, there are many there who know me, and a few who had cause to regret the acquaintance."

"But I had to go there to see certain persons, and being detained for several days, went to the Magnolia Inn and had pleasant quarters, for I told the host I had the money to pay for the best."

"You see I wear crutches from this wound, and I put on a false beard and wig, both gray, and dressing in the fashion, they took me for some wealthy planter."

"Ah, now I remember having seen just such a person at the trial."

"I was there, for time hanging heavy on my hands, I went there to be amused."

"But tell me, Master Irving, do you suspect any one as foes of the young tutor?"

"No."

"Yet you think him innocent?"

"I do."

"You don't know that he has offended any one?"

"I think not; that is, he was insulted by Mr. Ravelle, the day my father introduced them, and very promptly knocked down his insulter."

"Good!"

"But Ravelle overlooked it, at my father's demand, as he was the aggressor, and it is well that he did not call Bradford Carr out, for he is a dead-shot and a superb swordsman, having been victor over all at a tournament."

"Ah! that is a thing that some men do not readily forgive."

"But tell me, for I do not mean it for impudence, has your sister any other visitors?"

"A host of them she had until her engagement to Ravelle was announced."

"And your suspicion falls upon no one as having played a game to kill Ravelle and use the tutor as a tool?"

"No."

"Well, my suspicions fall upon two persons."

"Yours?"

"Yes."

"What reason have you to suspect any one?"

"I watched the trial very closely, and if I say it myself, Master Irving, I am a man with a long head, and I can read human nature well."

"Now I never would have attempted to bribe that jailer."

"Indeed?"

"No, for though his looks are against him to the average eye, he has that in his face that stamps him as a man of character and heart both."

"No, I should have tried some other plan with him."

"What?"

"Well, gained the interior of the jail, on some plausible excuse, caught him off his guard and knocked him down and bound him."

"I would have tried that, had you not aided me, for I thought of it; but tell me, Captain Palafox, who is it that you suspect as being the foes of Bradford Carr?"

"Do you remember the two young men who appeared against him?"

"Chester Granger and Barton Keys?"

"Yes."

"They were the ones who accused him."

"True; and they are the ones I suspect."

"It would be hard to believe that they could be so base."

"My boy, it is hard to look into a man's heart through his face."

"Mind you, you have your belief that Bradford Carr is not guilty, but can form no idea of who is, though you are searching for the real one."

"Now I also believe as you do, regarding the innocence of the tutor; but I have formed my idea that those two men are guilty of some plot against him, though they may not be the actors in it."

"One of them, the dark-faced one—"

"Barton Keys."

"Yes; well, he was the master-spirit, and the weaker one—"

"Chester Granger?"

"Yes; he looked to Keys continually while giving his testimony to see that he was doing right."

"Now, all I can say is for you to watch those two men, and if you find aught of a suspicious nature in their actions, just jot it down and post me."

"I will."

"See if either of them, now that Ravelle is dead, seeks to step into his place as far as your sweet sister is concerned."

"I will watch them closely."

"Now, as to our plan of action, Master Irving."

"Well, I leave it to you."

"That is right, and I will say Sunday night next."

"That will do."

"I know the country and waters, and I will land at a point half a league from the jail, reaching it by a path through the forest."

"Ah, that reminds me to tell you of an adventure I had on that path, which I know well," and Irving told of his being attacked by the footpad and his killing him.

"That was right, for you could do nothing else, Master Irving, and it was best that you did not tell of the affair."

"But describe the fellow, please."

Irving did so, and the pirate said quickly:

"One of my band, as I live."

"Ugly Ned we called him, as much for his ugly face as his hideous nature."

"His folks live in the village, and he went home to visit them, for they do not know that he is an outlaw, believing him to be a sailor."

"Well, you have done him a kindness in saving him from the gallows, rendered the country, in killing a pirate, a service, and I certainly thank you, on my part, and for the band, of ridding us of a fellow that no one liked, and whom we wanted out of it, so don't let Ugly Ned's death rest heavy on your conscience," and Captain Palafox laughed heartily, and calling to Myrtle, told her of the affair.

"I didn't like Ugly Ned, father; but Master Irving has done right, as he attacked him," said Myrtle, and she returned to her duties, while Captain Palafox continued:

"Now, Master Irving, I wish you to find out all you can for me about how matters are at the jail, and meet me at the landing on Sunday night."

"But you must not go with us."

"Must not?"

"I said so."

"And why not?" somewhat hotly said Irving.

"I will tell you why not."

"I certainly should like to know."

"Well, I am a pirate."

"Granted."

"I am leading a piratical expedition to break jail and release a prisoner under the law's sentence of death."

"Yes."

"You are a gentleman."

"I hope so."

"And the son of an honored planter, and as such you have no business to go marauding upon a midnight expedition."

"Captain Palafox, you are right, and I thank you, for you have opened my eyes."

"You felt for your friend, and did not see that in saving him you were becoming a criminal yourself."

"Indeed I thank you, sir."

"All right, my lad, you are heartily welcome; but if you wish to see your friend just stand off and on out in the Sound after we have landed, for you can put out in your little boat, and when we come back I will lay to for you to have a chat with him."

"Again I thank you, sir."

"Now, Master Irving, that we have arranged our plans, let us go in to dinner, for I see that Myrtle is ready for us, and then you can run back to the Blue Anchor whenever you are ready to go."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BOY'S GOOD ADVICE.

It was late in the afternoon when Irving Brandt took his departure from the pirate cabin in the Dismal Forest.

The fact is, he found Captain Palafox a most entertaining man, and Myrtle he certainly was charmed with.

In their society he could not bring himself to believe that he was associating with outlaws, and even excused his act.

When at last he took his leave, Myrtle rowed down with him in her light skiff to the lagoon's mouth, and there bade him good-by.

"I wish you would come again, Master Irving," she said softly.

"I may some of these days, Myrtle; but I wish you were not what you are."

"And what am I?"

"A pirate captain's daughter."

"I can't help that, Master Irving, for I was

born that way," was the innocent remark of the young girl.

"Oh, I do not blame you, Myrtle, only I wish you could be some one else, and your father too."

"Is being a pirate so bad?"

"Yes, it is pretty wicked."

"What do they do?"

"They kill and rob people on the seas."

"It would not be wicked if they killed and robbed people on the land then?" was the innocent question.

"Oh yes, it would."

"My father does not kill any one unless he attacks him, and he says the world owes him a living and he has to get it."

Irving saw that the girl was too innocent to argue with, so he said:

"Well, I hate to see you growing up in this swamp like a wild flower."

"Where else can I grow up, Master Irving?"

"In different surroundings."

"But I like this forest, and I love this gray moss, while I think wild flowers are very pretty and would like to be like one."

"You are too pretty to grow up wild."

"You might tame me then, as some of the men do birds and squirrels they catch."

"I wish you could be like my sister."

"Father says she is very beautiful."

"Yes, she is, but you are beautiful too."

"Then why do you wish me to be different?"

"I wish you to get away from the life you lead here."

"Ask your father to send you off to school in the city, and no one need know you are a pirate's daughter, and you could become a grand lady one of these days and make him so proud of you that he would give up the wicked life he leads, and you could have a lovely home elsewhere."

"Like your home, for I have seen it as we sailed by."

"Yes, as handsome a home as Brandt Manor."

"Well, Master Irving, I think that would be so nice, and I will ask father to send me to school, for I like to study, and he teaches me a great deal."

"That is right, Myrtle, and if you go to school in New Orleans I can see you."

"Tell your father to take you to Madam Chotard's; for there is where sis was educated and she knows more than the country parson, for Mr. Carr told me so himself, and he ought to know."

"Now good-by, Myrtle, and don't you forget to tease your father to send you to Madam Chotard," and after a warm grasp of hands across the gunwales of their boats, Irving Brandt raised his sail and stood out of the lagoon, Myrtle watching him until his boat grew dim in the distance, when she rowed rapidly back to the cabin to put her father to the test of withstanding her pleadings to go to the city to school, that she might become a beautiful lady just like Maud Brandt.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE.

CAPTAIN PALAFOX was utterly astounded when his daughter returned from the mouth of the lagoon, and went in burst him with:

"Father, I want to go to the city to school, have Madam Chotard for a teacher and learn to be a fine lady like Miss Maud Brandt, who is educated and knows more than the country parson, for Master Irving told me that Mr. Carr told him so and—"

"Avast there, my girl, and take a reef in that little tongue of yours or your breath will blow it to ribbons," cried Captain Palafox.

"But, father, I don't want to be a pirate's daughter."

"Well, I don't see exactly how you can help that, Myrtle."

"Well, Master Irving says if I go to school, Madam Chotard can make me as beautiful as his sister, and that I needn't tell anybody that you are a pirate, while you can become a gentleman and have a home just as fine as his home."

"Well, Master Irving has tied your tongue in the middle and it wags at both ends, I verily believe."

"No, he didn't touch my tongue, father."

"Well he touched your heart and your brain, and the boy is right, for you might be a fine lady, and I am an old fool not to have seen it before."

"Here I have been making a sailor out of you, and keeping you here among the alligators, or carrying you with me upon the seas to show you how skillfully I can cut a throat, scuttle a ship and rob a man of a purse and a woman of her jewels, when I should have had you at school, learning how to become a woman."

"Yes, I want to learn how to be a woman, father."

"And you shall."

"Oh, father!"

"I mean it."

"You will send me to the city?"

"Yes."

"To school?"

"I will."

"To Madam Chotard's?"

"Yes."

"Then you see if I don't grow up beautiful, and know more than a country parson, too."

And having decided upon this course, now that Irving Brandt's good advice to Myrtle had opened his eyes to the cruel course he had followed toward his only child, Captain Palafox sat up until late in the night, explaining to her all that it was necessary for her to know of the world she was going to enter, and how silent she must be upon the subject of what his career was.

"A few more years, my child, by the time you are ready to leave school, I will give up this life I lead, and together we will seek a home far from here, unless some young gallant wins your heart and keeps you in this merry land."

"So be content, Myrtle, for as soon as I rescue this friend of Master Irving, I will carry you to the city and place you under the care of Madam Chotard, and my word for it, no girl there will outshine you in beauty and intellect, and none shall in wealth, even if my gold has a red tinge to it— Ha! was not that the splash of an anchor in the lagoon?"

It was after midnight, for the father and daughter had taken no note of time, and expecting the lugger's return, Captain Palafox stepped to a small lookout window and looked out.

All was darkness and silence, and he at once gave a shrill whistle.

Then out upon the lagoon flashed a red light, and the pirate chief said quickly:

"It is Conrad, and the lugger has returned."

Opening the door he stepped outside, supporting himself upon a cane, and hailed:

"Ho, Conrad!"

"Ay, ay, sir, I am here," called out a voice on the water, and then followed the splash of oars and a few moments after a form advanced through the darkness.

"Ah, Conrad, you are welcome."

"Come in," and the captain ushered the visitor into the cabin.

As the lamp shone upon him it displayed a young man with a fearless face, stamped with refinement, though it had the look of one who was governed by evil rather than good.

He possessed a well-knit figure, and, dressed in sailor costume, was armed with a cutlass and belt containing two pistols and a Spanish dirk, the hilt of which glittered with diamonds.

He certainly was a rakish-looking individual, and one to capture a sensitive and romantic heart at sight, provided the said heart did not possess a mind that was capable of reading deeper than outward appearances.

"Well, captain, how's the wound?" he asked in a pleasant voice, as he threw himself into a chair.

"About well, thank you, Conrad."

"And you, sweet Myrtle, still up?"

"Why, you'll rob those pretty eyes of half their brightness if you keep late hours."

"I have been sitting up and talking with father, Conrad; but I will say good-night now," and the young girl took her departure to an inner room as soon as she had set a bottle of wine and glasses upon the table, with a jar of tobacco and pipes.

"Well, Conrad, what of your cruise?" asked Captain Palafox, when he had pushed the bottle and tobacco toward his lieutenant, for such the young man was.

"We had a successful cruise, sir, for I met the Spanish brig on time, and ran her cargo of wines up to the city; and I hailed the French barque the day I got back into the Gulf, and got from her the bales of laces and silks, and sent those up to Rudolph's also."

"You have done well, and smuggling pays us better than piracy, without having the blood-letting to do."

"I rather like the sea-fight to get booty, though, sir; for all the excitement in smuggling is in keeping out of the way of the cutters, and with a craft like the Devil Fish there is nothing to fear—though if they were as fleet as a little craft I know of, they would run us down."

"And what craft is that?"

"A prize I captured shortly after dark to-night."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. She was in a light breeze, and when I sighted her I threw out the sweeps and gave chase."

"I caught her; and just then a stiff wind came up, and she showed the lugger the way to the lagoon, with plenty of sail to spare, while the Devil Fish was rigged out in her best."

"That is strange, for I never saw the equal of the Devil Fish for speed, blow hard or light?"

"She's met more than her match this night, sir."

"And you captured the craft?"

"She lies in the lagoon, sir."

"What is she?"

"A sloop, built for a planter's yacht."

"Indeed! And where did you catch her?"

"In the lake, sir."

"Is she valuable?"

"Well, cargo she has none."

"And crew?"

"But one man."

"What!"

"But one man, and he was captain, mate and crew."

"What was the matter?"

"That I don't know, sir; but there was one other on board who, if I mistake not, will be a valuable prize."

"Ah! who is that?"

"A lady."

"Ha! Do you you know her name, Conrad?"

"I heard the captain, mate and crew call her Lady Maud, and I brought her for ransom."

"Great God! Conrad, you have done that this night which I would not have done for thousands of dollars!" cried Captain Palafox, in earnest tones, springing to his feet wholly oblivious of his wound, and gazing into the face of his young lieutenant, who sat like one thunderstruck by his captain's words and manner.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

"CONRAD, where is this lady?" sternly asked Captain Palafox, after an instant of silence.

"She is on the yacht, sir; but pray tell me, my dear captain, in what way have I offended?"

"You have not intentionally done so, Conrad, though you know I do not at any time make war upon the dwellers upon this coast far or near."

"I had no reason of knowing where the lady dwelt, sir, for when I hailed, the answers of this man who was all in all, except the passenger, were so ambiguous, as to lead me to believe that I was being inveigled into a trap, and even after I had my prize crew on board, I half expected to see men dash out of the hold to fight us to the death."

"I would give much had you not taken her."

"I did so, sir, thinking she would bring you a snug sum in ransom money, and, after seeing the yacht hurry the lugger so to keep in sight, I was determined that you should have a craft such as I had never met the equal of before."

"You meant well, Conrad; but you have made a mistake, and I will at once board the yacht and release her."

"Not send that craft off, now!"

"Yes, at once."

"But captain, they may turn her into a revenue cutter; and the saucy craft knows so much she will find her way back into this lagoon and hang us all."

"She must go, Conrad."

"Well, captain, you are the judge; but may I ask, sir, who is this lady whom you are so deeply interested in?"

"Yes; do you remember a youth who saved my life a year or so ago?"

"I do surely."

"It is his sister."

"Ah! now I see that I have made a mistake."

"Had I only known it, I would have bowed myself off her deck, sworn that I was a revenue officer hunting for pirates, and in fact been willing to turn honest to win one so beautiful, for she is all as a woman, what her yacht is as a vessel; but you are lame, sir, so shall I not go on board and set the fair bird free from her bondage, and tell that one-man-crew to get home with all dispatch, after I have piloted his craft out to sea?"

"No, Conrad, you remain here and finish that bottle, while I see the lady," and Captain Palafox seized his crutches and left the cabin.

Reaching the shore he was about to hail the lugger for a boat, when a slight form glided up to his side.

"What! Myrtle, you here?"

"Yes, father, and I will put you on board the yacht in my skiff."

"Please let me, for I want to see Master Irving's sister, for I heard all that Conrad said, and I wish to see just how I'll look when I get to be a beautiful fine lady."

"All right, Myrtle, bring your skiff here."

The girl dashed down the shore and soon had her skiff against the bank.

Stepping in, Captain Palafox took a seat, and seizing the oars Myrtle sent the skiff flying out over the inky waters of the lagoon.

There in the stream lay the yacht, silent and dark, excepting the glimmer of the lamp in the cabin.

"She is a beauty," said the pirate admiringly, as he approached the pretty little vessel.

"Ho that boat!" called out a voice from her deck.

"Palafox," was the reply of the chief.

"Ay, ay, sir," returned the one who hailed, and, as the skiff ran alongside he met the captain at the gangway.

"It is you, Breslin, is it?"

"Yes, captain, and I'm glad to see you around again, sir."

"Thank you."

"How many men have you on board?"

"The lieutenant left only three of us, sir."

"All right; has the lady been out of the cabin to-night?"

"No, sir."

"She has doubtless retired."

"No, sir, I saw her through the companion-way pacing to and fro, and I guess she's still at it."

"I will see her.

"Here, Myrtle, you wait here and you can see Miss Brandt and not be seen.

"Now, Breslin, go to the cabin and tell the lady that the pirate chief Palafox begs the honor of an immediate interview with her."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the sailor disappeared in the cabin.

In a minute he returned and said:

"The lady will see you, sir."

Descending into the cabin, while Myrtle watched in the shadow for a glimpse of Maud Brandt, Captain Palafox beheld the maiden standing by the center-table, upon which one hand rested lightly.

She was pale, but looked very beautiful as she stood there, awaiting with perfect calmness to face the man who was so dreaded upon the seas, and who held her fate in his hands.

"Miss Brandt, I believe," said the pirate, bowing with courtly grace.

"I am, sir; but may I ask how it is that I am known to you?" coldly answered Maud.

"Sufficient, lady, that I know you, and doing so, regret exceedingly that you have been alarmed and inconvenienced through my lieutenant."

"You are Captain Palafox the—"

She paused, and with a smile he said:

"The pirate, Miss Brandt, the Sea Fox, or whatever you are pleased to call me."

"I am sorry, sir, that one such as you are, should have the brand of outlaw upon him," said Maud with real feeling, as she gazed upon the handsome face of the man before her.

"It is the fault of circumstances, lady, that I am such; but let me at once relieve your mind by telling you that you are no longer the captive of a pirate, and, within the hour your vessel shall be upon the Sound returning to the haven whence she sailed."

"Oh, sir, you are indeed generous, and Heaven bless you," cried Maud, who, so suddenly transported from utter wretchedness to joy, completely broke down, and sinking into a chair she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PIRATE BEGS A FAVOR.

"It is a strange prayer, Miss Brant, that comes from your lips that Heaven may bless me, a pirate," said Palafox with some bitterness, when Maud had once more faced him, having subdued her emotion wholly and become calm after the burst of feeling she had shown.

"It is a prayer, sir, that comes from my heart, when I know that you are to let me free, for, oh, so much depends upon my freedom, a life hangs upon my immediate return home, and gladly will I pledge you any ransom if you will let me go now."

"Lady, I ask no ransom, and I am annoyed beyond expression that my officer should have captured you, but, as the wrong has been done, I can but do all in my power to remedy it, and, to relieve your mind, I will tell you at once that the life you seek to save shall not be taken."

"What! can it be possible that you know whom I mean?" asked Maud, in intense surprise.

"I know that you refer to a man now lying under sentence of death not many leagues from here."

"Oh, sir, how do you know this?" and Maud gazed upon the pirate with amazement.

"I further know," continued Palafox with a smile, as though enjoying her wonder, "that you have been to New Orleans to aid the escape of Mr. Bradford Carr."

"Oh, Heaven! is it known what I have done?"

"To me alone, lady, so do not alarm yourself."

"And why to you?"

"I have a way of finding out certain things, Miss Brandt, that perhaps does not fall to mankind in general."

"I have heard men speak of you as a wizard, and I almost half believe it," said Maud, half in earnest, half in doubt.

"Let me tell you that you will have time to reach the Blue Anchor and regain your room at an early hour, so that any one seeing you will believe that you have only been out for a walk, for there is a good breeze blowing out into the sound, and I will send several of my own men with you to aid Captain Joe in running the Lady Maud back to the creek from whence she started."

"Why, sir, you bewilder me with the knowledge which you have of my movements."

Palafox smiled and answered:

"Permit me also, Miss Brandt, to tell you that you need give yourself no more uneasiness regarding Mr. Bradford Carr, for his safety is assured, and I pledge you my honor, ay, a pirate's honor, that next Monday morning will break on him a free man."

"Heaven grant it; but tell me, how is it that you are interested in the welfare of Mr. Carr?"

"Simply because I strike at the strong and aid the weak when in my power."

"Simply because I do not believe that he is guilty, and wish to set him free that he may find out who is the criminal and foe who so nearly brought him to the gallows."

"And you say that he will be set free?"

"He will, and you will not have to use money to bribe his jailer."

"You are a remarkable man, Captain Palafox, and after what you have done for me, and pledge your honor to do for Mr. Carr, I wish it was, sir, in my power to serve you in some way," said Maud, earnestly.

"It is, Miss Brandt."

"What! in my power to serve you?"

"Yes, lady, you can render me a great favor if you only will."

"Gladly will I do what I can."

"It is a favor that I must beg of you, though I dislike to ask a service now, for it seems that I wish pay for giving you your liberty."

"I will not look upon it in that way, so tell me what I can do to serve you."

"Miss Brandt, do not look upon me as a flatterer when I say that the training you have had, along with your own mind and character, have made you a very brilliant woman."

Maud bowed in surprise, not knowing what was coming next.

"You were educated, I believe, at Madam Chotard's in New Orleans?"

Maud's surprise increased as she answered:

"I was, sir."

"It is a superior institution for the care of young ladies?"

"It is so considered."

"Would a young girl going there, who was comparatively friendless, be treated well?"

"Indeed she would, for Madam Chotard has a heart for all, and no one can help loving her," and Maud spoke with enthusiasm.

"I am glad to hear this, for there is one that I wish to place under her care."

"You?"

"No wonder you are astonished, Miss Brandt, that I, Palafox, the Pirate, should wish to send aught belonging to him to a place where she might learn to be a lady such as you are."

"But there is one, my only child, my daughter, now just verging into her teens, whom I do not wish to grow up in these gloomy wilds amid scenes that may make her other than she should be."

"Your child?"

"Yes, Miss Brandt, she is my child, and she was born on shipboard, and brought up more on the sea than on land."

"Her mother is dead, and I wish her under other influences, though her heart is as pure as your own, and she is so innocent of the world that she knows no wrong; but I wish her to learn of this great world of which she forms a part, humble as she is, and therefore I desire that she shall be under other influences than those with which I can surround her."

"Pardon me, but though she is so innocent now of the world and its wickedness, may she not, when her eyes are opened to the deeds of evil, your own life, indeed, then turn her heart against her own flesh and blood?"

"I understand you, Miss Brandt, and your argument is well put; but you do not know my child, for when she knows me as I am, then will she strive to make me different, and who knows but that she may in the end triumph."

"Heaven grant it; but where is this child?"

"She is a dweller in the gloom of these solitudes when on land, and when I am at sea, she is with me; but you will not refuse the favor I ask?" and the pirate looked pleadingly into the face of Maud, who asked:

"You wish me to take her then to Madam Chotard's?"

"I desire that she become your *protegee* there, Miss Brandt."

"That you write Madam Chotard that a young friend is to come there, Myrtle Marsden by name, and that she will be brought there by her father, Captain Marsden, who is a sailor, and consequently only very seldom in port; but that he will leave with her ample funds for all of his daughter's expenses."

"And you will dare to take her there?"

"Oh, yes, lady, why not?"

"You have a price set by law upon your head."

"I little care for that, lady, for I sat near you through the whole of Bradford Carr's trial, looking the law that outlawed me, and many who knew me, squarely in the face, and in my disguise no one knew me."

"Indeed are you a strange man, sir."

Palafox smiled, and said:

"When I carry Myrtle to Madam Chotard's, if you say that I may do so, I will be only a sea-captain, and no one will suspect that the colors I then sail under hide the black flag of a pirate."

"But you will not refuse me, Miss Brandt?"

"No, Captain Palafox, I would consider that I committed a great wrong, did I do so, for I would be refusing to save a young girl from a life of everlasting wretchedness."

"Thank you, oh, thank you, Miss Brandt," and gently raising the hand of Maud, the pirate chief bent low over it, and touched his lips softly to it in token of his gratitude:

Then he called out in a loud tone, as he stepped to the companionway:

"Myrtle, come here!"

CHAPTER XXX.

MAUD'S RETURN TO THE BLUE ANCHOR.

THE beautiful, sunny-faced girl that bounded down into the cabin at the call of her father, almost took Maud Brandt's breath away with admiration and amazement.

"And this is your child?" she said, as Myrtle, who had come in like a rocket, now stood demurely before her.

"Yes, Miss Brandt, that is my little Myrtle, whom I wish to rear as tenderly as though she were a hot-house flower, and not a sea-weed," answered Palafox.

"Come to me, you sweet little darling, and most gladly will I do all in my power to make you all that your sweet face demands that you should be."

Myrtle had gazed from the deck upon the beautiful girl, until she had almost believed her to be an angel, which she had read about, and now, when told to come to her side, she glided forward, and threw her arms about Maud's neck, while she said, earnestly:

"Oh, you are so beautiful!"

Seating herself upon a sofa, Maud drew Myrtle down by her side, and for some time the two talked together, until the rich maiden was perfectly charmed with the pirate's daughter, and promised that she would write Madam Chotard a strong letter in her behalf.

"Pardon me, Miss Brandt, but you must not remain longer here, for the hours are creeping by," at last said the pirate, and Maud sprung to her feet, realizing where she was.

"Oh, yes, I cannot delay, for no one at the Blue Anchor must know that I have been away."

"Will you let the yacht get under way at once, sir, and release Captain Joe?"

Captain Palafox had left the cabin, when Maud drew Myrtle beside her upon the sofa, and given his orders, so he said:

"Your yacht is now in the mouth of the lagoon, lady, and your man at his post, so we have but to say farewell, and you can soon be off, with a fair wind to carry you to the creek in the pines in a few hours."

"My three men will go with the yacht until she is near her destination, and then return in their light boat."

"Come, Myrtle, we must be off, and when next Miss Brandt sees you, I trust it will be at Madam Chotard's."

"I hope so, I feel so—good-by," and Maud kissed the girl affectionately, and then extended her hand to Palafox, while she said feelingly:

"Farewell, Captain Palafox, and may I some day meet you again, when you have become different from what you now are."

The chief bowed and answered:

"Miss Brandt, there is one favor more I have to ask of you."

"Well, sir."

"That you will not make known your visit here, and insist that Captain Joe will also remain silent upon the subject."

"Assuredly, sir, for I am not anxious, as you know, to have it discovered that I have been away from the Blue Anchor," and Maud went on deck with the pirate and his daughter.

Old Joe was standing near the companion-way and the pirate seaman Breslin had the tiller, while two others stood forward ready for the word to start.

"Ah, Lady Maud, I am happy to see that we are getting out of our trouble," said old Joe.

"Yes, and it is a trouble, Captain Joe, that must be forgotten by us, and never spoken of to any one."

"Yes, Lady Maud, it shall be kept secret, but I cannot forget that Palafox, the Pirate, is a true man, and has so treated you and I," heartily answered the old fisherman.

Then the order was given by Captain Palafox to get under way, and he and Myrtle went over the side into their boat, which had been brought along.

Out into the sound then glided the Lady Maud, her white sails caught the stiff breeze, and bending gracefully to it, she swept along at a pace that won the admiration of the three pirates.

Just as the eastern skies grew gray before the approach of dawn, the pirates shortened sail upon the yacht so that Captain Joe could handle her more readily and then took their departure, dropping over the stern into their towing-boat without stopping the headway of the little vessel.

Leaving them dancing in her wake, while they were setting sail, the Lady Maud sped on, and, just as the sun left the horizon to start upon its daily voyage, Old Joe put his tiller hard down and sent the sharp bow shoreward into an inlet.

Fifteen minutes after the yacht was hidden away in the basin from whence she had started, and leaving Captain Joe to look after her, Maud started at a quick walk through the pines to the Blue Anchor Inn.

The servants of the Blue Anchor were about their morning duties, and Captain Jake Curtis was smoking his pipe upon the piazza, when she

approached, and it was with fear and trembling that she walked up the steps.

"What! up so early and out for a walk, Miss Maud!"

"You must be better after your two days' hiding your face away from us all by keeping your room," called out the landlord cheerily, and Maud's heart gave a great bound of pleasure to feel that she had not been discovered in her daring adventure.

"Yes, captain, I have had a long walk; but I think I shall hide away for a day longer in the seclusion of my room," said Maud, who felt utterly worn out with her loss of rest and all she had gone through.

"I do not know what the young gentlemen will do, if you remain in seclusion, Miss Maud."

"I fear I shall lose them, and for my sake and for the sake of my pocket, I beg that you will show the light of your countenance during the day."

Maud laughed and hastened on to her room.

At the door she met Ellizette, who cried in eager tones:

"The Goo' Lor' be praised, missy, that you has got back, for I is a'most crazy."

"Why, Ellizette, you really look ill," and Maud sunk down in a chair herself almost overcome.

"I is ill, missy, for I has had to sit right here day and night, and oh me! the lies that I has told has kept the recordin' angel busy writin' 'em down, for it's been:

"Ellizette, how is Miss Brandt?"

"Better, sah."

"Ellizette, will Miss Maud be down to dinner?"

"No, sah, she has lost her appetite."

"Ellizette, just ask Miss Maud if she won't see me."

"I comes into the room and talks aloud, and then I goes back and says:

"No, ma'm, missy won't see anybody as long as she suffers the misery in her head she is now sufferin'."

"But can't I do something for her?"

"Yes, ma'm, she wants to be left alone, and she'll soon come round."

"Then, missy, your pa has been asking about you often, though he always seemed glad to know that you was asleep, as I told him so, and he wouldn't disturb you, he said."

"But he don't look just well hissef, missy, and I guesses he sets up late at night."

"Poor papal well, Ellizette, you have done nobly, and you deserve great credit; and, as you have told stories in a good cause, I guess you'll be forgiven for them."

"I hopes so, missy."

"Now get me undressed and I will go to bed, and you can truthfully say now that I am not well, that I walked out this morning, and felt ill upon my coming in, which is true."

"But what of my brother?"

"Hain't seen him, missy."

"Well, if your master comes again to see me, or my brother, you can admit them; but I do not wish to see any one else in the house."

"And you sha'n't missy, for if they didn't get in to see you when you wasn't here, they sha'n't now when you is here, if you says so."

"But I'll get you a cup of tea and then you just go to sleep and you'll feel better," and Ellizette soon had her young mistress comfortably ensconced in bed, and was herself slumbering on a rug a moment after, and snoring the snore of one who had done her duty and been relieved of care by the return of Maud.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE LADY MAUD.

IT will be seen by my kind reader that Palafox the Pirate did not once speak of Irving Brandt to his sister, for he had no desire to let Maud know that he had also met her brother.

He had told Irving, however, ere he knew of the capture of the Lady Maud by Conrad, his lieutenant, that he had better tell his sister that as the bribery plan would not work upon Dick Dresden the jailer, he would try some other plot.

But the unexpected arrival of Maud as a captive, made the pirate a little anxious as to how the brother and sister could reconcile their statements to each other.

Palafox had his motives for not wishing Maud to know that Irving Brandt knew him and his daughter, and hence he had asked her not to tell to any one her capture and release.

He had also told Irving to keep his secret acquaintance with him from every one, and he trusted in the wit and good sense of both to have all go right, or as he wished.

After leaving the lagoons of the Dismal Forest, Irving Brandt held on his course, with the wind free, directly for the cabin of Old Joe the fisherman, and arrived there just as Sandy was coming back from the Blue Anchor, whither he had been with fish.

"Lor', Master Irving, you scared me awfully by being gone so long, for I thought you was drowned, or had been picked up by the pirates sure."

"No, Sandy, I am all right as you see, but rather tired after my long cruise."

"I'd have told your father, if you hadn't

asked me not to speak of seeing you; but where have you been, sir?"

"Cruising along the coast, Sandy."

"The fact is I hope to make a sailor of myself some day."

"Folks do say that you are a good one now, and your sister can sail a boat like a man."

"Here, Sandy, is a gold piece for you."

"I have done nothing for it, sir, and I can't take it, thank you."

"It is for the use of the boat then."

"It belongs to Captain Joe then, and you can settle it with him."

"Sandy, you are too honest for this world," laughed Irving, as he walked on his way.

But halting he called out:

"Any news, Sandy, up at the Blue Anchor?"

"No, sir, only I heard your sister was sick, sir; but there is news up at the village."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"Ned Norcross, sir, was killed on the Pines road two nights ago, and they are looking for his murderer."

"Ah! do they suspect any one?"

"They do say that an old woman killed him, for some one saw Ned go into the Pines just after an old strange woman had gone that way."

"They called the woman Meg of the Magnolias, and say she was a fortune-teller; but if she is she'll know how to keep out of their way."

"Yes, I guess that she will, Sandy," and Irving again turned to go when the fisher-boy called out:

"I saw your yacht this morning, Master Irving."

"What yacht?"

"The Lady Maud."

"Where did you see her?"

"She rounded the point there, sir, just as I came in from fishing."

"Ah, yes, she has been to New Orleans, Sandy; but, good-morning," and Irving hastened on to the inlet where the yacht lay, glad to learn of her safe return.

But he got there to find his sister had departed some time before, and Old Joe, after making all ship-shape, was just about leaving.

"Well, Captain Joe, back again, I see."

"Yes, Master Irving, and Miss Maud has gone to the Blue Anchor."

"Got through all right, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, Captain Joe, I have the money here I promised you, and I'll get you to run the yacht back to-night and anchor her in Brandt Haven for me."

"All right, sir; but Lady Maud paid me for my services, and gave me more than I asked."

"Very well, I may need you some other time, and I thank you for what you have done; but come, I'll have to give an account of myself the past two days, so we'll go on board the yacht and run her up to the Blue Anchor harbor, so that I can say I went after her, and she'll be on hand if needed."

"It's a good idea, Master Irving," said the old fisherman, and ten minutes after the pretty craft, with her young captain at the helm, and Old Joe as crew, was flying along toward the Blue Anchor harbor.

As she ran in to an anchorage Irving saw that there was some excitement going on, for all the guests were out in force, and every eye was turned upon the beautiful vessel, while a cheer greeted the youth as he rowed ashore.

"Ah! I have it, Captain Joe, for there stands Boss, the Brandt Manor boatman, and he has evidently just arrived and told father that some one out the Lady Maud out."

"That's it, sir, and you can see the nigger grin as he sees you have fetched her in."

Springing ashore, Irving was greeted by his father with:

"My son, where did you get the Lady Maud?"

"I took Joe with me, sir, and brought her from her anchorage."

"And frightened Boss to death, for he had just arrived and told me the yacht had been cut out, when we saw her standing in."

"Of course we laid it to that arch-pirate, Palafox," said Barton Keys.

"Of course you did; but that arch-pirate is not guilty of half the charges laid at his door."

"But I was the pirate this time, and I think we can have many a pleasant sail in the Lady Maud before the season is over."

"Now you must excuse me, for I am as hungry as a wolf," and telling Boss to go on board the yacht and take charge, Irving hastened on to the Blue Anchor, and, after a substantial breakfast, sought his sister's room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

IT took several knocks to arouse Ellizette from her sound sleep; but she at last appeared at the door with the look of one who had been wide awake, but was prevented, from some cause, from coming promptly to the door.

"Oh, it's you, Marse Irving?" she cried.

"Yes, Ellizette, and I wish to see my sister! but I thought you were all dead in the room; you must have been sound asleep."

"Oh, no, sah; I were leaning out of the window closing the blinds, and didn't hear you knock. But missy's asleep, sah."

"Then I will not disturb her."

"No, I am awake, Ellizette. Wait, Irving, and I will see you," called out Maud from her bedroom.

Irving threw himself into a chair, while Ellizette hastened away to help her mistress make her toilet.

In a very few moments Maud came in, dressed in a morning wrapper that was most becoming to her.

She was pale, but her rest had refreshed her, and she greeted her brother affectionately, while she said:

"Well, Irving, I am back again, and no one knew of my absence."

"That is lucky, sis, and you are a brave girl. But there is no need of asking you if you got the money, for I know that you did."

"Yes, I got sufficient, with what I had, to answer all purposes. But I see that the Lady Maud is in the harbor."

"Yes, I went to the inlet and, finding Old Joe, determined to run the yacht here, so that I would be responsible for running off with her."

"It was the best plan, brother; but what a remarkable old woman you made of yourself!"

"Yes, and under other circumstances I could have had lots of fun; but I must keep dark, for there was a man killed over near the village, and they think that Meg of the Magnolias did it."

"Oh, brother! do you know aught of this deed?"

"Yes, Maud, a pirate attacked me with his knife and I shot him."

"But how did you know he was a pirate?"

"Oh, well, he wanted to rob me, and I call him a land-pirate."

"As I was disguised as Meg of the Magnolias I could do nothing, so I went on my way."

"Well, did you see Mr. Carr?"

"Oh, yes; and I told the jailer that, as a fortune-teller, I could see that he was not guilty."

"Well?"

"But Dick Dresden is not the man I took him for, as he would no more take a bribe than I would."

"Then what is to be done, Irving, to save him?"

"I have an idea that it can be done."

"But how?"

"That I cannot tell you, sis."

"Irving, do not do anything rash, but wait a few days and perhaps I can aid you."

"In the mean time you must see Mr. Carr in some way and give him this money, for he will need it, as father said he had but little, and this is his salary which he had not drawn."

"Also, Irving, I put a couple of hundreds with it, and you can tell him it is a loan from you, for he would not take it from me."

"I will do as you say, sis, and I hope to bring you news in a couple of days of Mr. Carr's escape."

"But how can you effect it, Irving?"

"Wait and see; but he is not going to die on a gallows, I promise you."

Maud felt worried—for not in Irving's secret, any more than he was in hers, she feared that he would do something rash and get himself into trouble.

She was already worried about his having to take the life of the footpad; but being done in his disguise of the old fortune-teller, she did not fear that he would be detected.

After meditating a moment she said:

"Irving, I am completely fagged out now by my trip, so cannot think; but I wish you to promise me that, though you will see Mr. Carr and give him the money, you will not make any move to effect his escape for at least three days."

"But, sister—"

"No, Irving; I must have your promise, for in that time I will be able to decide what is best."

"Well, sis, I'll do as you say," said Irving, glad to feel that he had an excuse for not doing something to free the poor prisoner and relying wholly upon the pirate chief as he did, but little dreaming that Maud was doing the same.

After some further conversation between the brother and sister in which it was a case of diamond cut diamond to hide the knowledge of each from the other, Irving arose to depart, but again turned to Maud and said:

"Sis, didn't you say father had promised you not to gamble any more?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he will keep his pledge?"

"God grant it, Irving."

"Well, I hope so; but he looks so haggard this morning I fear he has been up all night for it is just so that he looks when he gambles heavily."

"Ah, me! I hope all is right; but, brother, ask father to come up and see me, please, and I will have a talk with him," and the dread came over Maud that her father had indeed broken his pledge to her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GAMBLER'S LITTLE GAME.

WHEN Colonel Brandt went to his daughter's room, where Ellizette told him that Maud wished to see him, it was with a very bitter conscience.

He had not only broken his pledge to her, but he had lost to Barton Keys every dollar of the money which had been left among the personal effects of Soule Ravelle.

Then, each night, hoping to win back again his losses, he had continued playing and the result was that he had sunk deeper and deeper into the mire.

It was no wonder then that he had shunned meeting his daughter, for he had involved himself to a fearful degree.

His income was a few thousands a year and a home, and this would have been more than ample but for his love of gaming.

His children were both rich and the property left to them was believed to belong wholly to Colonel Brandt himself, and people considered that he was well able to lose largely and not feel the drain.

But with no money he had played, and to Barton Keys he had given notes for nearly fifty thousand dollars, without one-fiftieth of that sum to meet them.

Oh, how he cursed himself that he had not resisted temptation.

With the items against Keys and Granger in Soule's note-book, they would have been compelled, as gentlemen, to pay, did he demand it.

But that had slipped through his fingers by cards, and hoping to grasp more he had lost all and put his name to paper that must ruin him when the crash came.

He dared not tell Maud, for she could not help him, and Irving could do nothing with his property until he was of age.

Haggard, cursing his ill fortune, and in bad humor with the world he went to his daughter's room.

Maud saw the change at once and said quickly:

"Father, you are not well."

"No, my child, we seem to have both had an ill turn, and it is doubtless from being upset as we were about this trial of poor Carr."

This seemed an excuse, and Maud grasped at it, glad to feel that it was not that he had broken his pledge to her, and she said sadly:

"Well, sir, it will soon be over, and in a few weeks we will be at home again."

"Yes, and his ghost will haunt me there."

"Not so bad as that, father; but come, you do look really sick, so try and rally, for it will not do for a great strong man such as you are to get down."

"No, Maud, I will not be sick, and I'll try and be more cheerful; but what do you say to a cruise in the Lady Maud, for a few days?"

At any other time Maud would have been delighted at the prospect; but now she remained silent, for she did not wish to be away upon the sea when Sunday night should come around.

"I would rather remain quiet for a few days, father, and when we start for home we can go in the yacht and take a week's cruise, and we can ask some guest to accompany us."

"Well, as you please, Maud; but that reminds me, I have asked Mr. Keys to visit us at Brandt Manor this fall."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, for he is a clever fellow."

"Do you like him, father?"

"Well, I think he is one who improves upon acquaintance."

"I do not exactly like him, sir, nor his friend Mr. Granger either; but then it may be prejudice, and, as your friend, of course he will be welcomed at the manor."

Finding that his daughter did not suspect that he had broken faith, Colonel Brandt felt greatly relieved, and entered upon a round of praise regarding Barton Keys.

The fact was, that that young gambler had again asked for the hand of Maud, and in his power as he was, the colonel had put him off for awhile; but, thinking the matter over he had decided upon the same plan that had worked so well with Soule Ravelle.

That plan was to sacrifice Maud to save himself.

Not that he believed that he would be wronging her to any great extent, for he argued to himself:

"I do not like Keys, and he may be tricky, and is a gambler."

"But he is a favorite with all ladies, comes of an excellent family, and, as for gambling,

I am as bad, in fact worse, for Keys wins where I lose."

"Then he is, or will be rich, is handsome, gentlemanly and will doubtless make Maud a good husband."

"She will have to marry some man, and at first objected to Soule Ravelle; but she may have a romantic love for that poor fellow Carr, yet that will soon be over, and Keys must be her choice, for by her marrying him only can I be saved from ruin."

"I'll not press it now, for I have some time on my I O U's, to Keys; but as soon as Carr is hanged, then I'll have her decide; but Barton, my fine fellow, you'll have to pay me for your bride, I assure you."

Such was the colonel's line of reasoning, and a very bad line it was; but he had gotten deep into the mire and he felt that he must get to the shore, no matter whose heads he stepped on to insure his own safety.

Thus he left his daughter's room feeling in far better humor than before he had entered it, while Maud, on the contrary, felt a dread of coming evil.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHAT MAUD BRANDT SAW BY THE LIGHTNING'S FLASH.

THE Sunday night upon which Palafox, the Pirate, decided to act came in dark and threatening, for a storm was lowering over sea and land.

The guests of the Blue Anchor all stayed indoors and the parlors were filled with merry talkers.

Maud was not there, although she had been down in the afternoon and there were some good souls who felt sympathy for her, thinking that she was up in her room brooding over the death of her lover.

Irving Brandt was also absent from the parlors; but then that precocious youth was generally absent from social gatherings and was not missed.

There were a few old gamblers present who wanted to play whist, yet dared not on account of its being the Sabbath evening and appearances had to be observed at least as examples for the young.

As for Irving Brandt, he was waiting at the rendezvous appointed with Captain Palafox, while Maud was in her room, anxious, dreading, hoping, but it was not of the dead Soule Ravelle that she thought, but of the lonely prisoner in his cell.

Ellizette eyed her mistress wonderingly as she paced to and fro, for never before had she seen her so excited.

Presently a loud peal of thunder fairly shook the old mansion, and though Maud had always reveled in the warring of the elements, now she uttered a cry of alarm and she shrunk away as though the electric current had touched her.

But quickly recovering herself, she cried:

"Oh, Ellizette, I thought it was the deep boom of a cannon and it startled me so."

"What for any cannons firing here, missy?" asked Ellizette.

"Well, a cruiser might be in the offing, you know," and going to the window Maud looked out upon the darkness.

The wind was howling savagely and the huge trees were bending beneath its rude blasts, while a vivid sheet of lightning showed that the waters of the sound were white with foam and the war of the waves falling upon the shore was constant and loud.

"Oh, will he dare face this storm?" cried Maud.

"I guess Massa Irving safe, missy, on board the yacht, for I seen him and Ross making her ship-shape before night and dropping another anchor," remarked Ellizette, who thought her mistress referred to her brother.

Maud said nothing in response, but continued to gaze out upon the storm, taking advantage of every flash of lightning to send her glances sweeping over the sound.

"No, no; he would not dare to face this blow to run in, bold as he is, for the channels here are narrow and circuitous, and no pilot would venture in," said Maud, as after many flashes of lightning she failed to detect any vessel upon the storm-swept waters.

Leaving the window, she paced to and fro again, her face pale and her lips set, and evidently striving hard to be calm.

At length there came slowly from her lips the words:

"He promised, and he seems the man to

mean what he said; but something tells me that if Bradford Carr is not rescued this night, he will never be saved from the gallows."

After half an hour more had passed, she again went to the window, and, drawing the curtain about her, stood waiting impatiently for a flash of lightning.

"The storm increases in fury, and I must give up all hope."

"Hark! how those mad waves break upon the beach, and the wind fairly rocks this old mansion; so how can a vessel live in it?"

"Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by a gleam of light flashing over sea and land, and it was followed by a peal of thunder so terrific that every voice below stairs was silenced, and Ellizette uttered a piercing cry of alarm.

But Maud heeded not the silence below stairs, nor the shriek of her frightened maid, for the lightning had shown her a dark object out upon the wild waters.

Breathless she stood awaiting for another flash, her eyes stationed upon the sea, her whole manner that of one whose heart and soul was strung up to the highest tension.

One, two, three moments passed, and then came a flash that seemed to set the earth on fire.

And with it there broke from Maud's lips the ringing words:

"There! oh, there is the vessel! The pirate has kept his word, brave, noble man that he is!"

"Lordy, missy, did the lightning strike you, and has you gone clean crazy?" said Ellizette in alarm, rushing to her side.

"Silence, girl, and leave me alone!" and, as the quadroon girl sprang back, hurt at the harsh words from one who never had spoken thus to her before, Maud still remained at the window, waiting for the glare of the lightning to come again.

"Yes, there is his lugger, and she drives on like a phantom of the storm."

"Ha! that lightning stroke seemed to descend almost upon her."

"But, no! she flies on unhurt, and heads for the inlet where he said he would land."

"Now I am content, for, Bradford Carr, this night you will be free, and you will owe your freedom to Palafox the pirate."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SEA FOX AT WORK.

STANDING in the shelter of the pines, enveloped in his storm suit, Irving Brandt watched the storm arise with some anxiety, lest it might deter the pirate from running in as he had promised.

"Irving had started early for the place of rendezvous, going thither in a small boat from Old Joe's cabin, and, hauling it into a cove, he took up a position to wait for the coming of Captain Palafox."

As the storm burst in fury upon the waters and shore, the boy clung close to a large pine to escape its fury, but kept his eyes fixed upon the Sound, to detect the coming lugger the instant she bore in sight.

But the tempest was a violent one, and increasing in fury. Irving began to fear that even the daring pirate would not risk running the channel in such a blow.

As he stood there, a huge pine not far from him was shivered to atoms by the lightning, and the boy closed his eyes to shut out the vivid glare that almost blinded him. But he did not leave his post, and was soon gazing down the Sound once more, though now he had given up almost in despair of seeing the pirate that night.

"Hurrah! there he comes!" he suddenly shouted, as the lightning showed him, as it had Maud, standing at her window in the Blue Anchor, the lugger driving along almost under bare poles.

"She has just sail enough set to steer by, and she's following the channel as though it was broad daylight."

"Bravo for the man if he is a pirate."

The lugger could now be seen by the almost constant flashes driving along at a terrific speed, and literally covered with foaming seas.

Through the channel she drove around a wooded point that sheltered her, and then gliding into the inlet she ran close inshore and dropped anchor.

A moment after a boat was lowered, and as it came ashore Irving met it.

"Ha, my young friend, is that you?" called out the cheery voice of Captain Palafox.

"Yes, sir."

"The storm did not keep you back?"
"Oh, no, sir, but I was afraid that it would you."

"You don't know me to say that; but have you a boat here?"

"Yes, she lies in the cove there."

"Well, you had better get her and run out to the lugger in her, for you will find Myrtle on board."

"Did she come with you in all this storm?"

"Oh, yes; she's a child of the sea, you know, and storms do not frighten her."

"You do not wish me to go with you?"

"I cannot permit it, Master Irving."

"How will you get in the—"

"Sh! woods have ears as well as walls, but trust me to accomplish what I have laid out to do."

"Now, go on board the lugger and entertain Myrtle, and when I return I will take your boat in tow and run you into the inlet below the Blue Anchor."

"Thank you, sir, and it will give me a chance to see Myrtle and have a talk with Mr. Carr also."

"There you are again, speaking names aloud; but I must be off."

"Come, lads, we have a rough march ahead of us, but a short one," and Captain Palafox turned to the half-score of men that had landed with him, and all of whom were heavily armed.

The captain limped slightly, but had cast aside his crutch, and moved off at a brisk pace, Irving watching them until they were out of sight, and then going to his boat and pulling out to the lugger.

As though thoroughly acquainted with the path, Palafox led the way through the somber, moss-hung forest, and after half an hour's walk came in sight of the village lights.

"There are but two houses this side of the jail, lads, so we need fear no trouble; but, mind you, I want no shot fired without my orders."

"Now, put on your masks and follow me."

The men covered their faces with black masks and moved on once more.

It had now begun to pour rain, but the hardy tars did not care for that and not a murmur was heard.

At last the gate in the jail wall was reached, and ranging his men upon each side, Captain Palafox knocked loudly with the huge iron knocker.

Three times he did so before, in the noise of the storm, the sound was heard.

Then a stern voice said:

"Well, who is there?"

"It's me, Dick."

"I don't know your voice."

"I am Constable Hines, and I have a prisoner to lock up."

"Quick and open the gate, Dick, for this rain is drowning us."

"All right, Hines, I'll be there in a minute," returned the jailer.

In a short while he came out of the jail enveloped in his great-coat, and bearing a bunch of keys in one hand and a lantern in the other.

"Hurry up, Dick, or we'll float away," said the captain, mimicking the voice of the village constable, Hines, who was a large man, but had a squeaking tone when talking.

The key was placed in the gate, it turned in the lock, and as Dick Dresden threw it open he was seized by strong arms and in an instant he was a prisoner, bound hand and foot and gagged.

"Bring him in out of the rain," ordered the pirate leader, and the party moved toward the jail door, which was open.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SURPRISE.

As Captain Palafox stepped into the jail door, he held a cutlass in his hand, not seemingly knowing what opposition he might meet.

But no one confronted him, and as his men filed in behind him, four of them bearing the prisoner, Captain Palafox said:

"Place him there."

The men laid Dick Dresden upon the floor.

"Now remove the gag from his mouth."

This was also done.

"Dick Dresden, in what cell is the prisoner, Bradford Carr?"

"I will not tell you."

"The jail is not so large but that a short search will soon discover, but I want the key of his cell."

"You will never get it from me."

"Don't be stubborn, man, for your life may be the forfeit."

"So be it; I would rather die in the discharge of my duty, than live from having cowardly deserted my post."

"Those are good sentiments, Dick, and you are a brave man; but we have come here for a purpose to-night, and we intend to execute it."

"Who are you?"

"That does not concern you."

"You intend to release that man under sentence of death?"

"We do, if you mean Bradford Carr."

"I do mean him, and I warn you that punishment will follow for this."

"Who will punish us?"

"The law."

"Eah! what do we care for the law?"

"You will care, for I tell you that this outrage will cause you to be hunted down and punished."

"Where will you find us?"

"You are dwellers about here, who, filled with sentiment for the prisoner, wish to save his neck."

"Don't talk any more, Dick, but give me the keys."

"I will not."

"Very well, I shall find them."

A short search revealed the bunch of keys, and then the pirate leader called out in a loud tone:

"Ho, Bradford Carr!"

"Ay, ay, who calls?" came faintly from the second story.

Following the sound, the pirate chief ascended the stairs, turned along a corridor, and again called:

"Bradford Carr!"

"Here."

"All right, sir, and your friends are here," and Captain Palafox began to fit different keys in the lock, while Bradford Carr gazed in amazement at the group of men in the corridor, and whose faces were masked and forms enveloped in storm-cloaks, from which the water ran in rivulets, forming pools upon the floor.

"Who are you?" asked Bradford Carr, facing the pirates as the grated door was flung open.

"Your friends."

"What is your name, sir?"

"What care you for the name of a man who has come here to serve you?"

"Why are you here?"

"To save you from the gallows."

"Ah! by what authority?"

"That of justice, to enable you to save your neck, and living, be able to prove what you cannot being dead, your innocence."

"I fear you will only get yourselves into trouble, my friends."

"Don't think of us, but of yourself."

"You wish to take me with you?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure evil will not follow to yourselves?"

"We'll take all chances."

"Then I will go."

"Where are the keys to those irons that hold you?"

"On the bunch with the cell key."

The pirate at once sought for and found the key, and in an instant Bradford Carr was free.

"Now come, for we have no time to lose."

All obeyed the order, but seeing that the prisoner walked with difficulty, Captain Palafox called out:

"Two of you men aid Mr. Carr there, for his long confinement has told on him."

Two of the pirates at once placed themselves beside Bradford Carr and aided him down the stairs.

"Well, sir, it seems that you are not friendless," said Dick Dresden, the jailer, as they passed along the corridor and he caught sight of the prisoner.

"So it seems, sir."

"I fear you will have to do the same for your friends that they do for you to-night, for the law will hunt them hard."

"I sincerely hope that they may not fall into its clutches and be treated as mercilessly as I have been," said Bradford Carr, sharply.

"I believe myself, sir, that you are innocent of the crime; but the law found you otherwise, and hence your sentence."

"Well, Mr. Dresden, I have only to thank you for your kindness to me, and say good-by, for I must not detain my friends, who have risked so much to save me."

With this the pirates moved on with Brad-

ford Carr in their midst, and once more they faced the pitiless storm.

But as they passed through the gate the sound of tramping feet and voices was heard, and, seen by the flashing of lanterns which they carried, were a number of men hastening toward the jail.

"Ha! some one has given the alarm."

"On, men!" cried Palafox, the Pirate.

"Ha! ha! your punishment may come sooner than I thought, for my negro assistant you failed to capture, and he has brought the villagers down upon you," shouted Dick Dresden.

Then, raising his voice, he cried:

"Ho, friends! to the rescue! There go the jail-breakers toward the Pines."

"To the rescue! to the rescue!"

His ringing voice was heard by the rescuing party, and shouts were heard and stern orders as the party of villagers rushed toward the pirates, who were now seen by them hastening toward the pine forests.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FLIGHT.

HARDLY had the pursuing villagers caught sight of the moving mass, which they knew to be a body of men retreating from the jail, when some one called out:

"There they go! fire!"

Several shots were fired, but without any effect, and it at once became a flight for the pirates and pursuit for the villagers.

Unfortunately for Captain Palafox, when he captured Dick Dresden the jailer he forgot about his negro assistant.

That worthy, with pluck and cunning, had beaten a hasty retreat, crept along the wall to the gate, and running like a deer, had burst into the tap-room of the Magnolia Inn with:

"Lordy, gemmans! de jail am bein' bu'sted wide open, Massa Dick am bein' killed dead an' de priz'ners is bein' let loose a-howlin', so come fer de love of de Lord an' save us."

As it was a stormy night the tap-room was crowded with men, fully half a hundred being present, and each and all of them were on their feet in an instant.

"What is it, Moke?" yelled the landlord.

Again was the negro story told, and voices shouted:

"To the rescue!"

"Kill the jail-breakers!"

"Come all to the jail!"

"Arm yourselves, men, and follow me!"

"Lead the way, Moke!"

For a minute it was a perfect Babel of voices and Pandemonium of excitement.

Then order was brought out of chaos by a leading spirit commanding silence and calling upon all good and true men to follow him to the rescue.

Then, armed with what weapons they could hastily gather, and some with axes, rakes and clubs, the party started, some twenty in number, while others promised to run home for their rifles and reinforce them at the jail.

Such was the party that were now in chase of the pirates, and they kept their courage up by shouting and firing a shot now and then.

Upon reaching the Pines, Palafox halted his men for a minute and then called out in his voice, that rung like a trumpet:

"Ho, you noisy hounds!"

"Back to your kennels, or we will fire upon you!"

Without waiting to see the effect of his words, the chief urged his party along the path through the Pines, and, gaining strength with exercise Bradford Carr no longer retarded their flight.

But the villagers, although halting at the command of the pirate captain, and considerably demoralized for fear of a volley being poured upon them, were suddenly headed by Dick Dresden, who had been quickly released by the faithful Moke.

Seizing his rifle and pistols, and leaving the negro in charge at the jail, he rushed to the head of the party of villagers and cried:

"Come men, don't tarry here, for there is work to be done."

A cheer greeted his words and a voice called out:

"You lead us, Dick Dresden."

"I cannot lead cowards that will not come—Ha! there come others from the village and they will go."

"On, men, and we will capture those daring fellows, and retake the prisoner they have rescued; for though he may not be guilty, the

law found him so, and he must die on the gallows, for such was his sentence.

"On men, and follow Dick Dresden."

The second party had now come up, and believing that in union there is strength, the villagers gave three cheers, and followed the lead of the brave jailer.

But the pirates had now gained a considerable start, and a stern chase is proverbially a long one, so Dresden found his party would never overtake the jail-breakers, especially as his force would not, or could not, travel as rapidly as he wished.

Their lanterns he made them put out, though the carriers of them demurred, until he told them that they would only serve as targets for their foes, and then they were doused with an alacrity that was ludicrous.

The rain still fell heavily, but the wind was not as severe, and there were signs of the storm breaking away.

On through the dark Pines pushed pursued and pursuers, until at last the former came out upon the clearing near the inlet.

"Lugger aboy!" shouted Captain Palafox, as they approached the shore.

"Aboy the shore!" came back in the clear tones of Conrad, the pirate lieutenant.

"Send a boat ashore in haste."

"Is that you, captain?"

"Ay, ay."

"What name?" asked the cautious officer.

"Devil Fish."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Be in a hurry lads," called out Palafox, and a moment after a boat came dancing shoreward over the rough waters.

Just as it touched the beach the villagers came out of the Pines, some two-score in number, and Dick Dresden shouted:

"Halt, there, or we fire on you!"

"I advise you not to, for I shall return the fire," cried Palafox.

"Surrender your prisoner, or receive our fire!" came from the jailer.

"Do you think we are fools?" cried the pirate.

"Is that your answer?"

"Yes."

"Ready, men, fire!"

A scattering volley came from the villagers, and a pirate dropped dead, while another was wounded.

"Do you surrender?" yelled the jailer, still advancing toward the shore.

But the words of the pirate chief convinced him that they had not, for he shouted!

"Ho, the lugger."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Train a gun on that gang of pursuers, and if they do not retreat at my command, send a load of grape into them!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

But hardly had the response of Conrad reached the ears of his captain, when, with wild cries of alarm the pursuing party broke in a terrific stampede and scampered for the Pines, unheeding the command of Dick Dresden to charge and take the jail-breakers on the shore, and the craft would not dare fire upon them.

"This is too bad," cried the brave jailer, as he found himself deserted by all but three of his volunteer band, and beheld the boat stand off from the shore, bearing the rescued prisoner and those who had so boldly saved him from the gallows.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MEETING ON THE LUGGER.

By the time the boat touched the side of the lugger, the anchor was up, and sail enough set to send the craft flying out of danger.

"Come, Mr. Carr, I'll look after the vessel, while you go into the cabin, for there you will find a friend awaiting you," said Captain Palafox to the rescued man, as soon as he touched the deck of the lugger, and he led the way toward the cabin.

Irving Brandt and Myrtle had both been on deck watching the scene on shore; but they had retired to the cabin as the boat put off, as the youth preferred to meet his tutor there.

Descending into the cabin at the request of Captain Palafox, who remained on deck to take the helm, for he alone knew the channel in such a night, Bradford Carr started with surprise and joy as Irving Brandt sprung forward to greet him.

"Oh, Mr. Bradford, I am so happy to see you free," cried the boy, grasping the hand of his tutor, and wringing it hard.

"And I to be free, Irving; but I owe my freedom to you, I feel."

"Oh, no, sir, for I could do nothing for you, so got the captain to aid you, which he intended doing anyhow; but let me introduce you to the captain's daughter, Miss Myrtle Marsden."

"Ah! I am happy to meet you, my sweet little friend, and after your father has served me so well, I hope we will be the best of friends."

"I hope so, sir, for I love my friends, and Master Irving is one," said Myrtle, simply.

"And who is this bold captain that has done so much for me, Irving?"

"Mr. Carr, it is one whom you have heard of often, and do not admire; but he is one whose life I once saved, and failing to rescue you myself by bribery, and determined that you should not die, I sought his aid, and it was given freely, for he like myself believed you to be guiltless of the murder for which you were sentenced."

"I am guiltless, Irving, as I hope some day to prove; but who is this captain who has saved me from the gallows, and yet whom I do not admire?"

"His name is Captain Palafox, and he is known along the coast as the Sea Fox."

"Ha! the pirate!" cried Bradford Carr, in utter amazement.

"Yes, sir."

"And he has saved my life this night?"

"He has."

"And he was the leader of those masked men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Irving, this is astounding news you give me."

"It is true, sir."

"And this is a pirate vessel?"

"Yes, Mr. Carr."

"And whither does it take me, and you?"

"It takes you to safety, sir, from whence you can depart for wherever you please; while I shall leave the vessel in half an hour, and return to the Blue Anchor Inn."

"Irving, there is some strange mystery in all this; but I will not question you more, but ask you of yourself, your father and sister?"

"They are well, sir, and in this letter you will find the amount of your salary, which you had left in father's hands; but do not read the letter now," said Irving, quickly, as he feared, if his tutor discovered that he had given other money, which he asked him to accept as a loan, he would not take it.

"As you please, Irving; but are we not to meet again?"

"I hope so, sir."

"That means when I prove myself innocent of the charge of murder?"

"I intend to help you do that, sir."

"Come, Master Irving, you must leave us now, for I have run into the cove for you," called out the pirate captain down the companionway, and with a hasty farewell to Myrtle and Bradford Carr, the youth ran out of the cabin, and in a moment after was in his boat alone upon the waters, while the lugger dashed on her way seaward.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FOOTBALL OF FATE.

"WELL, sir, you are a free man, to go where you will, and to do as suits your humor best."

The one who uttered these words was Captain Palafox, the Pirate, and the one he addressed was Bradford Carr.

The latter was standing upon the stern of the Devil Fish, gazing out upon the dark waters of the bayou, or lagoon, and upon the moss-hung trees upon every side, yet seemingly not seeing the scene spread out before him.

It was the morning after the storm, and the lugger lay at anchor just off the cabin of the pirate.

Myrtle and her father had gone on shore at an early hour, leaving Bradford Carr asleep, for just before dawn he had retired to rest, and the lugger had been some time at her anchorage before he awoke and ascended to the deck.

Seeing him, the pirate captain had come out to the lugger and addressed him in the words that open this chapter.

In response Bradford Carr said:

"Yes, I am a free man, and I owe my freedom to you, sir, and to the brave youth whom you so kindly aided."

"I have been much trouble to both of you."

"None in the least, my dear sir."

"As Master Irving told you, he served me well once, and when he could not rescue you by bribery, then he thought of me, and knowing me to be a law-breaker, and having my pledge to serve him when I could, he boldly came to me."

"But, Mr. Bradford, I was at your trial, and somehow received the idea that you were not guilty, but was being punished for others, and my nature being to aid those who are in distress, and save the weak from the strong, I had determined to rescue you ere Master Irving came to me."

"Now you are a free man, and I would advise that you seek a home far from here, and when you are able to do so, to come back and prove your innocence."

"If, on the contrary you desire a berth with me, you can have one, next in rank to Lieutenant Conrad, but I would not advise any man to step across the threshold of outlawry as long as he can live on the other side."

"You are generous, sir, and certainly honest in the way you put matters."

"If I were really guilty of the crime for which I was sentenced, then I would grasp your hand and accept your kind offer; but, being innocent, I will go elsewhere and endeavor to build up a new name and associations where this stigma does not rest upon me."

"I think you are right, sir; and yet I have a revengeful vein in my nature that causes me to wish to hunt down those who injure me."

"Now I have gold in plenty, and, if it is sullied perhaps in the winning, it is at your service if you desire to disguise yourself and remain here to go on the track of those who have wronged you so deeply, for I believe you can, in time, hunt them out of their shell."

"You are certainly most kind, sir, and I will tell you what I will do," suddenly and eagerly said Bradford Carr, as though impressed with a thought that had flashed through his mind.

"Well, sir?"

"I will remain your guest for a few days, and in that time discover one thing which I am anxious to learn."

"If it turns out as I wish I will accept your offer of aid and go on the track of those who have so cruelly wronged me."

"If it turns out otherwise, I will go away and, the football of fate, will drift with the tide of circumstances."

"Nature teaches me to long for revenge, but I have been educated for the priesthood, Captain Palafox, though I have never taken orders, and the teachings of Christianity are that I forgive my enemies."

"Thus feeling, I cast my future upon one possibility, one hope, and if that fails me, then I am content to go through life as duty calls me."

"You are a strange man, Mr. Carr, and I admire you greatly, and trust, come what may to you, that you will ever consider me your friend."

"If the world uses you hard, then look me up, for before you leave I will give you an address through which I can be found; but I trust that all will come out here as you wish, and then I will have the pleasure of watching your course through life here in our midst, though a pirate and a priest can never be friends."

"You mistake, sir, for it is the duty of a priest to be the friend of the erring, those whom others have cast off, that he may win them back to honor."

"Egad, I wish you would accept the berth of chaplain on the Devil Fish, and my word for it, you would have us all under an honorable flag within the year," said Captain Palafox warmly, and Bradford Carr smiled at the thought.

"But, come," said Palafox, "Myrtle is calling us to breakfast and we will go on shore."

CHAPTER XL.

THE TIDINGS REACH THE BLUE ANCHOR.

The morning after the storm broke light and beautiful and the guests of the Blue Anchor were anxious to get out and enjoy the balmy breeze that came in from the Gulf.

Here and there a tree was uprooted, limbs and branches were scattered about the lawn, and there were other traces of the fierceness of the storm.

The Lady Maud, in spite of her two anchors, had dragged nearer inshore, and Boss,

who had remained on board over night, said that she had plunged and dived until he thought she would ride under, although she was anchored in a cove outside of the full blast of the tempest.

Had it been the intention of the guests of the Blue Anchor to sleep late, as was their wont, that morning a circumstance occurred to arouse them at an early hour.

That was the dashing up to the door of a party of horsemen, headed by Dick Dresden, the jailer.

"Hullo, Dick, what's wrong?" sang out Captain Jake Curtis, who was enjoying his morning pipe as usual upon the front piazza.

"Wrong enough, Captain Jake, for my jail was robbed last night."

The words were spoken in a crisp tone, clear and cutting, and they reached the ears of the sleepers who were just turning over for their second nap, and sent them to the window.

"Your jail robbed?" asked the genial landlord, springing to his feet and advancing toward the horseman.

"Yes, sir, and of its most valuable property, while that of a poorer kind was not touched."

"I did not know that you had such rich property in the jail, Dick."

"I had prisoners, sir, and have prisoners yet, but there is one missing."

"Hail and who is that one?"

"It is Bradford Carr, who was to be hanged next Friday."

"Thank God for that!" ejaculated Captain Curtis, with a heartiness that caused Dick Dresden to say:

"I see that you, too, are glad of my mishap; but, though I felt sorry for that young man and hoped he might be cleared, as it turned out otherwise, it was my duty to hold and to hang him."

"But now he has gone."

"And I am glad of it, for it would take more juries than could be gathered around here to convince me that Mr. Carr was guilty."

"But when did he get away?"

"Last night."

"In the storm?"

"Yes."

"How did he escape?"

"He was aided out of jail."

"But who aided him?"

"A band of half a score men."

"But who were they?"

"They all wore masks, and at first I believed they were a party of young men about here who sympathized with Mr. Carr, but they retreated to the Horseshoe Inlet, and boarded a vessel, which at once put out to deep water."

"Not?"

"Yes, and I am going along the coast now to see if I can hear of a craft being seen to answer her description."

"They played a bold game, Dick, wherever they were."

"They did, indeed, and were as cool about it as could be."

"Moke, my negro boy, aroused the villagers when they captured me and some half-hundred came to the rescue."

"Why did they not capture the whole party?"

"Bah! can a cat catch a wolf?"

"Not easily."

"Well, we pressed them to the Horseshoe Cove and fired upon them, but with what result is not known, but you know I am not a man to miss my mark, and I aimed true."

"But their leader threatened to fire a heavy gun from his vessel upon my party, and they broke for the woods in such a stampede that I only was able to collect them with me by this morning."

"Well, this is remarkable, Dick."

"It is terrible for me, as it hurts me to lose a prisoner."

"No doubt, and justly so, for you take pride in your duty."

"You did not see such a craft going by, Captain Jake?"

"What kind of a craft, Dick?"

"A large lugger."

"Was she armed?"

"Yes, she must have been, or her captain could not have said he would fire on my party."

"He could have said it, Dick, if he could not have fired."

"That is so!"

"About what time was it, Dick?"

"Early in the evening, for the lugger was out of sight before midnight."

"No, I never saw the vessel, Dick, for it was too bad a night for me to poke my head out; but here's Master Irving Brandt, and he's always around in a blow, for he likes 'em, and if anybody saw the lugger, he's the one."

This was an accidental shot from Captain Jake, but it hit the target, and Irving, who just then walked up, flushed crimson.

But he kept his nerve and coolly asked:

"What is it I saw, Captain Jake?"

Dick Dresden told his story, and Irving remarked:

"Yes, I was out last night, for I was anxious about the Lady Maud, and you can see that I had reason, Captain Jake, as she has dragged her anchors fully the length of the cable."

"But did you see a lugger?"

"Oh, yes, Jailer Dresden, I did."

"When?" eagerly asked the jailer.

"Last night."

"Where?"

"She was standing seaward, about a quarter of a mile from here, reefed down and yet driving along at a fearful pace."

"Well, I declare, that is a clew," said one of Dick Dresden's party.

"I don't see the clew, as the jailer and his party saw the lugger themselves, and she was then standing seaward," coolly said Irving.

"But that was at the Horseshoe Cove."

"Well, she could not get out into deep water unless she came by here, and that proves she is not up the coast in any of the inlets."

"But I will signal Boss to come on shore, for he may have seen the lugger too, and know which way she headed."

Boss was signaled and soon came on shore, and, in response to the jailer's questions said that he had been on the deck of the Lady Maud until the storm blew over, and had seen a lugger go by.

"Was she going fast?"

"Yes, Massa Jailer, as dough de debble were arter her."

"And which way did she head?"

"She run down toward Fisherman Inlet and luffed up."

"What?"

"Yes, sah, and I looked at her from de night-glass and see her drop a boat overboard."

"A boat?"

"Yes, sah!"

"Who was in it?"

"A man, sah."

"A man?"

"I didn't see no odder, sah."

"Then which way did she go?"

"Out to sea, sah."

"And the boat?"

"I looked for de boat, sah, but de waves was running too sassy for me to see it."

"You don't think it was sunk?"

"Guess not, sah, for de man dat hab de narve ter go ober in dat sea, c'u'd take keer ob hisself, I reckons."

"This is indeed a clew, and I thank you, Master Brandt for sending for your boatman for me."

"You are entirely welcome, Jailer Dresden," said Irving coolly, and he added:

"If you will take a suggestion from me, I would, if in your place, go all along the coast as far as the Dismal Forest, and even in it—"

"No, sir, there is no need of going that far," cried one of the horsemen, and others quickly echoed his opinion.

"Well, as far as you deem it necessary to try and learn where the boat landed."

"You are right, Master Brandt, and I will do as you suggest."

"Come, men, we have a clew now, and must follow it up," and Dick Dresden and his men dashed off at full speed, while Captain Jake Curtis said dryly:

"He's anxious to get back his man, but those who so daringly planned the escape of Mr. Carr do not mean that he shall be taken."

"That is my opinion, Captain Jake," said Irving, as he turned and walked down to the shore with his negro boatman.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOUDS DISAPPEARING.

MAUD BRANDT, after having seen the lugger driving by to go to the rescue of Bradford Carr, had stood like a statue at the window, afraid to turn away for an instant.

Ellizette was alarmed at the manner of her mistress, but whenever she spoke to her, was commanded in stern tones to keep silent.

It seemed ages to the watcher, but at last a cry broke forth from her as her eyes once more fell upon the lugger, dashing by as though on the very wings of the wind.

With earnest gaze she watched her, until she disappeared in the darkness and gloom, and then she said fervently:

"Heaven, I thank thee!"

Turning away from the window, to the surprise of Ellizette, she called to her in pleasant tones, and the quadroon was at once at her side.

"I expect you think I was cross to night, Ellizette; but I would not have missed what I saw for worlds, and I did not wish to be disturbed."

"Yes, missy, it was a grand storm, but it was too fine for me, for the thunder was so terrible I expected to see you struck every minute."

"Well, Ellizette, the storm is over now, and I shall retire," and Maud was soon buried in deep slumber.

But the clatter of hoofs aroused her early the following morning, and springing to her window she heard all that passed between Dick Dresden and those with whom he was conversing.

"Saved—free! Now indeed I am happy, even if I never see him more," and Maud clasped her little hands together as though uttering a prayer of thankfulness for the safety of Bradford Carr.

The guests of the Blue Anchor were early to breakfast that morning, and the one topic of conversation was the escape of Bradford Carr.

Most of those who had known him well rejoiced at his escape from an ignominious death, while others shook their heads dubiously, and wondered what it all meant, and what would come of it all.

Chester Granger and Barton Keys entered the breakfast-room with anything but cheerful faces, for they had heard all, and when asked for their opinion they gave it freely.

"I believe that the fellow was a pirate, and that his crew helped him off," said Chester Granger, viciously.

"You certainly do not give my father credit for much sense, sir, to think that he would engage a pirate in Baltimore and bring him into his family as my tutor," hotly said Irving Brandt, and Chester Granger was silenced by a kick under the table from Barton Keys as he was about to make some hateful response, while the latter said pleasantly:

"You misunderstood Granger, Irving, for he did not mean to say your father would knowingly engage a man whose antecedents he knew nothing of, but that he had unwittingly done so."

"You surely have the good sense, Mr. Keys not to suspect that Mr. Carr was other than he represented himself?" said Irving.

"Of Mr. Carr's past life I know nothing, Irving, and care less."

"He was most clever in his way, a gentleman, a man of accomplishments, and I liked him immensely, but when I found that he so coolly killed poor Ravelle, then I had to feel that he was under false colors."

"Still it is pleasant to know that his aristocratic neck is not to be stretched by the hangman."

Upon the subject of Bradford Carr's escape Maud had little to say, and her manner warded off all conversation, while the colonel was inclined to believe that the young tutor had indeed been in league with outlaws, as such certainly must have been the ones who aided him.

"They were pirates evidently," said the Spanish Don, who was a guest at the Blue Anchor.

"If they had been pirates, sir," answered Irving, who was ready to take up the cudgel for his tutor, "it is remarkable that they were so tender in regard to human life."

"My idea of pirates, from all I have heard of them, is that they are a lawless and murdering set, and if these masked men had been buccaneers, why did they not kill Jailer Dresden instead of binding him, and why was it that when pressed by their pursuers they did not fire upon them?"

"Why, they even did not return the fire of the villagers, although Jailer Dresden asserts that he killed one."

"This certainly does not look like piratical work."

Irving's argument was a clincher, and he carried the majority with him.

He was a boy of few words, but ever the genial young gentleman, and every one liked him, while in his skill as a horseman, shot, sailor and swimmer he was acknowledged by men as their equal, if not their superior.

Therefore, when he spoke all listened, and it was from knowing the boy as he did, that Barton Keys prevented Chester Granger angering him, feeling that a split would come in the association of themselves and the Brandts.

After breakfast Irving followed his sister to her room, and as soon as the door was closed behind them he cried:

"Could anything be more delightful, sis?"

"I am certainly rejoiced, Irving, and it is better as it is, don't you think so?"

"How do you mean?"

"That Mr. Carr has escaped without your aid or mine."

"Yes, it is better as it is; but I do not intend any man shall paint him blacker than that jury painted him, and now say that he is a pirate."

"I was glad that you spoke as you did, Irving, and your argument was a good one; but I think Mr. Granger is inclined to heap all the ignominy he can upon poor Carr."

"He is not here to defend himself, so I will do so."

"They may call him a murderer, for the jury found him such to their satisfaction, but there Mr. Granger's slurs shall end, or he answers to me, for Bradford Carr was my tutor, and is my friend."

"Don't be rash, brother."

"I am never rash, sis."

"Well, it is over now, and let it pass, for I am happy that the shadow of the gallows no longer falls upon us, and the clouds that have so long been over us are disappearing."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SHADOWS DEEPENING.

SOME days had passed away after the mysterious escape from prison of Bradford Carr.

The day appointed for his execution had gone by, and Dick Dresden had not been called upon to tie the hangman's knot.

Nor had the jailer been able to find any clew to his missing prisoner.

He had ridden up and down the coast with his posse, and made inquiries of every individual dweller along the shore.

But not one could tell him anything to help him find his prisoner.

The boat seen by Boss to leave the lugger could also not be traced, and at last Dick Dresden was forced to give it up.

The villagers wondered, but had to wonder on, for they could not solve the mystery, and the belief gradually gained ground that those who had aided Bradford Carr to escape had been none other than men who had been at the trial, and believing the prisoner rather than the testimony, had decided to give him the benefit of a doubt, and hence had helped him to go free, all leaving in some chartered craft to throw suspicion off the scent.

After the escape of Bradford Carr, Maud became more cheerful, and her place as queen was resumed once more in the Blue Anchor circle.

All knew that she had hardly known Soule Ravelle, and that the match between them had been a parental-made affair, and of course she could not be expected to show deep grief for the dead planter, while any feeling she had held for Bradford Carr she had kept pretty well a secret.

Colonel Brandt had been called over to New Orleans in regard to the will of Soule Ravelle, and a sale of the young planter's estates and slaves had been agreed upon, to hide the fact that they were mortgaged.

The sale had taken place, and the cash, over the debts, paid over to Colonel Brandt, who had returned to the Blue Anchor to report to Maud the result.

As Soule Ravelle was known to have inherited a vast fortune, it was naturally supposed that a large sum had been placed to Maud's credit from the sale, as his heiress, and her suitors became that more urgent to win her regard: for, with her own inheritance, and what it was supposed her father would leave her, she would simply be immensely wealthy.

But the world did not see behind the scenes, and know that Soule Ravelle had left her a

bankrupt inheritance almost, while as for her father, he had nothing, and Colonel Brandt was the last man on earth to instruct the public as to the affairs of himself and family.

Maud was rich, it was true, and Irving had a fine property, while Colonel Brandt, when Maud married, or not marrying, reached the age of twenty-one, could receive from her a snug little sum, ample to support his declining years in luxury.

But this Maud could not draw, except under such conditions, and her property was so placed that she could not aid her father, did she wish ever so much, beyond her income, unless it was by giving him the money received from the Ravelle sale.

But the colonel was pledged to the amount of nearly fifty thousand dollars to Barton Keys for gambling-debts, and thus matters stood as the season at the Blue Anchor Inn was drawing to a close, and the guests were preparing to return to their homes.

One pleasant evening, just after sunset, and between daylight and dark, Maud walked away from her companions, and strolled alone to the little arbor built on the end of the Blue Anchor dock.

It was a favorite resort of hers, and she was wont to sit there by the hour looking out upon the blue waters, and listening to the waves washing against the piers.

As she walked there she had not noticed a skiff dart under the dock near the end and not reappear, so, unconscious of the presence of any one other than herself being near, she sat down and gazed out upon the sea.

Darkness was deepening around her, and she was enjoying the scene, when she heard a step upon the wooden pier, and looking up saw a form advancing.

It was too late for Maud to recognize the intruder upon her solitude, but she said impatiently:

"I do wish I could be alone, without having to go to the privacy of my room."

"Now who is this, I wonder?"

As the form drew nearer she said.

"Ah! it's papa! Well, I am not to be bored, at least."

It was Colonel Brandt, and having seen his daughter go off alone, he had found an opportunity he had been watching for, and at once pounced upon it.

He had something to say to Maud, and it had to be said at once, for on the morrow they were to start in the yacht for home, though they would first go to New Orleans for a few days' stay.

The fact was that Colonel Brandt had had a chat with Barton Keys, and he was growing desperate as regarded his pecuniary affairs.

Maud had seen that something worried him, and hoped that it was not that he had broken his pledge to her, for she could not believe that he would do that.

"Well, father, were you afraid to have me here alone at night?" she asked pleasantly, as the colonel approached.

"No, Maud, but I wished to have a talk with you, as we leave to-morrow."

"And I will be glad to be alone once more in our own dear old Brandt Manor."

"And so will I," heartily said the colonel.

Then a silence fell between them for some minutes, and Maud broke it with:

"Has Boss returned with the Lady Maud's crew?"

"Yes, they arrived this afternoon, and Irving goes aboard to-night as captain."

"Dear, good Irving, what a noble fellow he is, father."

"He is indeed."

"But, Maud, it is of you that I wish to speak now," and the colonel seemed nervous and distressed.

"Of me, sir?"

"Yes."

"Have I done aught to deserve a scolding?"

"Oh, no."

"Then what is it, father?"

"Maud, you did not love Soule Ravelle?"

"No, sir."

"I half believed that you loved Bradford Carr."

"Well, sir?"

"Ravelle is dead."

"Yes."

"And Carr is a fugitive from justice."

"Yes, from injustice."

"With a crime upon his soul."

"Pardon me, but accused of a crime which

I will not believe him guilty of unless he tells me that he is."

"Well, he was sentenced, was to die, has escaped in a mysterious manner, and must needs be a wanderer if not worse."

"How worse?"

"He may have herded with pirates as most men do when flying from justice."

"Bradford Carr has never done that, father."

"If guilty of killing Soule Ravelle, then he might have done so; but innocent, he never could descend so low in the grade of crime."

"You defend him of course."

"He was my friend, and believing that he has done nothing to forfeit my friendship of course I defend him."

"And so does Irving."

"And I admire him for it."

"Well, we will not discuss Bradford Carr, or Soule Ravelle."

"Yes, father, I wish to discuss the latter, for I intend to devote every dollar inherited from him to build up some charity in his name."

"First I intend that he shall have a monument, for I owe that to his memory, and the balance, as I told you, I shall devote to charity."

"I shall order his monument when in New Orleans, and also decide to what charitable object I shall devote the remainder realized from the sale of his property."

Colonel Brandt sat like a statue, as though sitting for the marble tomb which Maud spoke of erecting, and his face was as white and hard.

Twice he essayed to speak, but failed, and it was only after springing to his feet and pacing to and fro across the little arbor that he found words to say:

"Maud, it will be time enough to talk of monuments and charities to the memory of Soule Ravelle, when we reach New Orleans: but now I wish to talk about yourself, and, had not that wild fellow been a profligate, he might have left you a handsome fortune, instead of the leavings of a grand inheritance."

"Father! not one word from your lips against Soule Ravelle."

"He is dead, so speak not ill of him."

"What he has left me, I am satisfied with, and shall devote to his memory," and Maud's angry manner fairly cowed her father, who sunk back on the settee with a sigh, which his own guilty conscience wrung from him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE REFUSAL.

It was some time before Colonel Brandt could bring himself to speak, after being rebuked as he had by Maud, when he spoke slurringly of Soule Ravelle.

As he remained silent, Maud, quick to repent of a harsh word, saw that she had hurt him, and said softly:

"Forgive me, father, but I was cut to feel that you was speaking ill of the man you wished me to marry, and who is in his grave."

"I did not know him as his death revealed him."

"We are all liable to err, sir, and Mr. Ravelle sinned in the way that best suited him."

"He was a spendthrift if you will, but his money was his own to spend, and now that he is dead let his faults and his follies be forgotten by us, or at least not remembered in unkindness."

"Well, Maud, you are ever charitable and forgiving; but now I must speak upon a matter that comes close to the heart of all of us."

"I am ready to hear, father."

"It is something I wish you not to speak hastily upon."

"Well, sir."

"It is a matter I wish I could have put off speaking to you about for the present."

"And what is this all-important matter, father?"

"Barton Keys' father arrived last night."

"I am aware of that, sir."

"He is a really fine old gentleman."

"He is indeed, sir, and I was most pleased with him."

"I wish his son was more like him."

"He will be as he grows older."

"Repentance in old age is not generally lasting, father."

The colonel shivered, but said:

"Well, Barton is not bad; he is young, not thirty yet, a trifle wild perhaps, and certainly a gentleman, coming of good stock, for the

Keys hold up their heads among the best in the land, Maud."

"Judging from the elder one I think they have cause, and I only hope the younger one will not give his family cause to lower their heads."

"You are severe, Maud; but Barton has a good heart, and he only needs a woman's hand to guide him right."

"He has a mother and sister, I believe?"

"Yes, but he is in search of a wife."

"I know half a dozen girls at the Blue Anchor who would marry him."

"True, but he does not love them."

"I do not think he should love them all."

"He loves one person."

"Indeed! has he made you his confidant, father?"

"Yes."

"Then you should not betray him, even to his daughter."

"But he wishes me to betray him, Maud."

"What a remarkable man; he has a secret and wants it known."

"Yes, Maud."

"Why does he not hint it to old Mrs. De Vigne, or to her old maid daughter, Mademoiselle Lucie, if he wishes it to go the rounds, for they will spread it like wildfire."

"Maud, I wish you would be serious."

"I am, father."

"Now listen to me."

"I am all attention, sir."

"Barton Keys loves you."

"So he told me, sir."

"And you answered?"

"That I did not love him."

"But, Maud, you must love some one."

"There is no law to that effect, sir."

"There is a human law that governs all, and I do wish to see you happily married."

"I am getting old, Maud, and I have not felt just myself of late, and I do not wish to leave you, should I pass away, unprotected in this world."

"Why, father, don't be blue, for you will live to a ripe old age, for you are not fifty yet."

"And as for leaving me uncared for and unprotected, I certainly have an ample fortune to live on, and for a protector there is Irving."

"But Irving will marry."

"Well, it will be some years yet, father, and I can still have him for a protector without making his wife jealous, whoever she may be."

"No, no, father, do not fret yourself about me, and get over this attack of the blues at once."

"Why, I must doctor you when we get home."

"Maud, you talk at random; but what have you against Mr. Keys?"

"Nothing, sir, for or against."

"Could you not learn to love him?"

"I have never thought of it, sir."

"Well, he and his father have both made a formal proposal for your hand, and I have given my consent, and it rests with you now."

"I do not love Mr. Keys, father, nor do I wish to marry him."

"But, Maud—"

"You have my answer, father."

"Oh, Maud! do not send me back with such an answer, or I am ruined!"

The words broke from the lips of Colonel Brandt in such piteous tones that Maud sprung to his side in an instant, for she saw that he was shaken body and soul by some inward emotion he could not control.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ACCEPTANCE.

"Oh, father! what do your words mean?" cried Maud, as she bent over her father as he sat upon the wooden settee in the little arbor, his face buried in his hands and his form quivering.

"Do not ask me, Maud," he groaned.

"But I must ask you."

"No! no! no!"

"Father, what is this fearful thing that distresses you so?"

"I cannot tell you."

"But you must, for you act as though a pall hung over our lives."

"Tell me, and if I can drive away the clouds gladly will I."

"Oh, Maud! those words give me hope."

"Hope of what, father?"

"Maud, do you refuse to marry Mr. Keys?"

"Father, why do you speak of that distasteful subject to me?"

"I speak of it Maud, because I must have an answer."

"I have told you, sir."

"And I tell you that your negative answer ruins me."

"What can you mean, father?"

"Maud, I have broken my pledge!"

The cry that came from her lips at these words showed how hard it hurt her to hear this shameful confession.

For some moments she could not speak; but then she said coldly:

"I had hoped that I was no longer a gambler's daughter, and I had not expected this of you, father."

"Forgive me, Maud!"

"As you connect your confession with the name of Barton Keys, I wish to know just what I have to forgive?"

"I will tell you all, Maud."

"And I will listen, sir, be it ever so painful to hear."

"You know that I told you there was an entry in Ravelle's note-book of debts due him by Granger and Keys?"

"Yes, and I told you to let them go."

"Would to God I had done as you said; but I did not!"

"Father!"

"I told them of the items, and they both said that they had paid the sums; and Keys saw Granger pay his, so there could be no doubt, if I took their word for it."

"But Keys did not wish to remain under the thought that he owed, simply because Ravelle had neglected to cancel the items as paid, and he proposed that I should play him a game of cards for them."

"I was tempted and yielded, and, having fallen, I went on deeper into the mire, losing the cash which Ravelle had left; and then, in sheer desperation, hoping to win back my losses, I kept on."

"With what money, sir?"

"None!"

"Indeed! Is this allowable, father?"

"No, not among gentlemen; but I gave my notes."

"With what prospect of paying them?"

"None, Maud."

"Oh, father!"

"But I had the prospect of luck changing in my favor."

"You were depending solely upon luck, then, the fickle Goddess of Fortune, to save your honor, father?"

"Luck must change some time, Maud."

"It seems to be very hard on those against whom it once turns, father."

"But how much did you lose?"

"I am afraid to tell you."

"I must know, father."

"Forty odd thousand dollars!"

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon you, my poor father, for you are indeed ruined, as I cannot help you!"

"Oh, yes, you can, Maud."

"No, father, for you know that I cannot raise one dollar above the income."

"But, Maud, Keys will give me back my notes if you will become his wife."

"Ah, father! you sold me once, and now you wish to sell me again, and to a man I do not believe is as good at heart as was Soule Ravelle."

"I am a gambler's daughter, and you wish me to become a gambler's wife."

"Maud, I talked over this with Keys, and he says that he will give his pledge, with mine, that he will not play another game for money, from the day you become engaged to him."

"Pledges are empty words, I have found, father."

"Well, his father does not know that he gambles, and he wrote to him to come over here to the Blue Anchor, expressly to see you, and told him he hoped to see him make you his wife."

"His father says you are too good for his wild boy, but hopes that you will marry him and reform him from sowing wild oats; and he promises to give him a handsome sum in cash as a wedding present."

"Well, father, an idea strikes me of how I can help you out of your trouble."

"How, Maud?" eagerly asked the old gambler.

"You told me that the sum coming to me from the Ravelle sale was something over forty thousand dollars?"

"Yes," gasped the man.

"Would it cover your notes to Keys?"

"Yes, it would."

"Then draw it from the bank, pay him, give me the notes, and that will end it by my being forced to accept an inheritance which it went against my heart to do."

"But, Maud!"

"Well, father."

"I have not told you the extent of my sins."

"What, more?" sadly said Maud.

"Yes."

"Tell me all, for I am nerved now to bear everything."

"If you do not marry Keys, he will force me to pay, and I am ruined; but if you marry him, then he hands me back my notes."

"So you said, sir."

"Well, Maud, you see how I am situated?"

"I do, sir, and I have shown you a way out of your difficulty."

"But how, Maud?"

"Pay to him the money in bank from the Ravelle inheritance."

"It is not in the bank."

"Get it from the lawyer's hands, then, father."

"But the lawyer has not got it."

"Then who has, father?"

"The gaming-table," groaned the unhappy man.

"What! that, too! Oh, father! father!"

"Yes, Maud, that went, too, and I am utterly undone."

Maud silently paced to and fro.

The moon was rising and shone upon her face as white as marble, and her lips were hard and sternly set.

She was indeed a gambler's daughter.

She had seen her father break his pledges, and he had cruelly robbed her.

Like the drunkard, he had reformed when not tempted, and fallen when the temptation was before him.

He had robbed her, his child, and now he was a ruined man she well knew, unless she sacrificed herself for him.

At once her mind was made up.

She would save him.

Her heart's love had been wrecked, and she was willing for the sacrifice.

So she said in a low, quivering voice:

"Father, I will marry Mr. Keys, and he must give into my hands your notes, for he shall see that he buys his wife, and that you sacrifice your daughter."

"Give me your arm, and we will go and seek my future husband."

They left the arbor together, the man utterly overcome, and neither saw a skiff with a single occupant in it dart out from under the pier and row away swiftly over the moonlit waters, nor dreamed that the oarsman had heard all that passed over his head.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE COMPACT.

IN her cosy little sitting-room at the Blue Anchor sat Maud Brandt, some time after the painful scene on the pier with her father.

She was very pale, but calm, and appeared to be awaiting the coming of some one.

Her father had escorted her to the house, and she had asked him to bring the Messrs. Keys to her.

"No, Maud, if you are going to be severe, at least spare the old man, for he does not understand how matters are," urged the colonel.

"You are right, father, I was wrong to think of wounding the feelings of a trusting father."

"He can come when we have arranged it with his son."

"But what have we to arrange, my child?"

"The bargain."

"What bargain?"

"The sale."

"I do not understand you, Maud."

"I am to sell myself, am I not, father, to pay your debts?"

"Maud! Maud! I wish that I had died ere I brought this upon you."

"Never mind, father, all will be well, and I will try and live contented; but I wish to see you and Mr. Barton Keys in this room together, and now."

Colonel Brandt could but obey.

The suspense to him was terrible, and he at once sought the young gambler.

"Keys, I wish you would come with me to Maud's parlor."

"Ah! this is hopeful."

"Does the invitation include Granger?"

"It does not," was the short reply.

The two then went together to the little parlor, and in answer to her father's knock Maud bade them enter.

She was seated near the center table, and the lamp shed a rich light upon her, displaying her lovely face and form to perfection.

"Be seated, Mr. Keys.

"Father, there is your favorite chair," she said, pleasantly.

Barton Keys, for some reason, felt uncomfortable.

He was a man who always had his wits about him; but now he was at a loss for one of his usually light pleasantries and remained silent.

As for the colonel, he was as thoroughly uncomfortable as any man could well be, and certainly as he deserved to be.

Seeing that both waited for her, Maud said in her soft, musical voice:

"Mr. Barton, some time since you did me the honor to say that you loved me."

"I told you the truth, Miss Brandt," was the earnest reply.

"I then told you that I did not love you?"

"Yes, but I trust you have changed toward me."

"I have changed my mind somewhat, from what it was then."

"I certainly am delighted to hear this."

"And my father," continued Maud in the same soft, sweet way, "tells me that you have begged him to intercede for you?"

"Yes, I so asked him."

"He has done so."

"With a favorable result I sincerely hope."

"Well, he asked me to become your wife."

"And your answer?"

"Is conditional, sir."

"Conditional, Miss Brandt?"

"Yes."

"Will you name your conditions and allow me to set them aside by yielding?"

"I believe you gamble, Mr. Keys?"

This was a dead shot, and Barton Keys started as though it had hit him.

But he was a thoroughly trained man of the world, and he answered right out:

"It is a sin that I possess along with others, Miss Brandt, which I wish I was well rid of."

"You are certainly frank, sir; but before I accept your offer it will be one of my conditions that you will give up gambling from the day we become engaged, for, being the daughter of a gambler, I have certainly no desire to add to my misery by becoming the wife of one."

Colonel Brandt groaned, but Barton Keys promptly said:

"You are perfectly right to exact this promise, Miss Brandt, and I give it with all my heart."

"Thank you, sir; now I believe, that you have played heavily with my father?"

"I have."

"And he has lost to you?"

"He has, Miss Brandt."

"Let me do Keys the justice here, Maud, to say that he urged me not to play, telling me that I was in a groove of ill luck and must lose."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Keys."

"I did not wish your father to involve himself more than he already had, Miss Brandt."

"It was kind of you, sir, and will you now tell me the sum that he owes you?"

"Barton Keys took out his note-book, and after glancing at some papers, said:

"Just forty-two thousand five hundred dollars."

"I believe that this is the sum that you offered my father for me?"

"Miss Brandt, I beg of you not to be severe."

"I offered myself as your suitor before your father owed me a dollar."

"Then, when I again urged my suit to him, I said by way of pleasantry, that I would cancel his debt to me if you became my wife."

"Ah, and if I did not?"

"It is a debt, Miss Brandt."

"A gambling-debt?"

"Yes, and with gentlemen, from some unaccountable reasoning, a gambling-debt is held as more an obligation of honor than is a bill one owes his tailor or wine merchant."

"This is a strange reasoning, though I admit its truth, for with the one you owe for goods received, and for the other it is simply the trying to make money from one's best friend, even, upon the turn of a card."

"Granted, Miss Brandt, but nevertheless thus the world rules."

"And you are willing to pay that sum for me, sir?"

"I certainly cancel the debt against your father, if I am to be honored as his son-in-law."

"Have you those notes of my father?"

"They are here in my note-book."

"Well, Mr. Keys, I have told my father that I will be your wife, and I now tell you so, but upon the following conditions."

"Name them, please."

"That we become engaged now."

"Yes."

"That from this night you pledge your honor to give up gambling."

"Yes."

"That my father again makes the same pledge, and I may as well add to him that I have forgiven the past, but will not the future should he break faith."

"And I make the pledge, Maud, by the memory of your dead mother."

"Oh, father! see that you never break the vow just made," said Maud earnestly.

"I never will, so help me Heaven!"

"Amen!" fervently ejaculated Barton Keys.

"And, Mr. Keys," continued Maud, "my last condition is that you hand over to me now those notes of my father."

He took them out of his pocket and promptly handed them to her.

She looked over each one, counted the aggregate, and said:

"Forty-two thousand and five hundred dollars."

"Thank you, sir."

"It is you that I have to thank, Miss Brandt."

"We'll waive the thanks, Mr. Keys, and I now give you my pledge to become your wife one year from to-day."

"Not sooner?" he asked, with a look of intense disappointment.

"No, sir, not sooner."

"I must be content," and rising, he bent over and touched her hand to his lips, after which he left the room, leaving father and daughter together.

Straight to his room he went, and there sat Granger awaiting him.

"Congratulate me, Ches, for I am engaged."

Chester Granger turned pale, and muttered:

"Engaged?"

"Yes, and to Miss Maud Brandt, the heiress of three fortunes."

"But I had to fork over the notes of the old man, and will have to wait a year for my bride and her money; but father will come down handsomely now, and keep me well supplied."

"But come, don't look blue, but let us have a little game, and I'll give you a chance to win back some of the money you owe me," and the man who had just pledged himself not to gamble sat down to the table and began to play with his dupe, to drag him deeper into debt's Slough of Despond.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TWO BUCCANEERS.

LEAVING the Blue Anchor Inn, two days after the compact between Maud and Barton Keys, Colonel Brandt and his family sailed in the Lady Maud for New Orleans, to run around by way of the Mississippi river and not, as was frequently the case, to the lake shore and thence to the city by vehicle.

Barton Keys and several others had been invited to join the family, so that the little vessel had a goodly number of passengers; and with Irving as captain, and a crew of six negroes, she set sail on her voyage with a fair wind and every prospect of a pleasant cruise.

It was the afternoon when she set sail, and just as night was coming on a strange sail was sighted.

"What do you make of her, Boss?" asked Irving of his negro mate.

"I don't like her looks for nuffin', Massa Irbin', an' I jist t'inks dat Miss Lady Maud hab better show her heels an' part comp'ny wid her, sah."

"So I think, Boss, for she has a rakish look that belongs to either a revenue-cutter or—"

"A pirate, sah."

"That is just it; but the Lady sails too well to be caught."

"Yas, sah, unless she am cotched by some-ting dat do sail weller."

"That's so, Boss, but I think the craft that can beat her is yet to have her keel laid."

"I hope so, sah; but just look how dat feller do come on."

The strange sail was a rakish-looking schooner and she was under a spread of canvas and so headed as to cross ahead or astern of the Lady Maud's course if held as she then was, according to her speed in sailing.

Seeing that she was coming on with a bone in her teeth, Irving determined to let the Lady Maud fall of a few points so as to throw the schooner astern, and then to see if she came on after her.

This was quickly done and the schooner almost as quickly changed her course and set her top-sails.

"She's after us, Boss, so set the top-sail and flying jib, and we'll see if the Lady Maud can not drop him, for I do not like his looks."

These orders were quickly obeyed and the yacht sped along at a pace which showed that she was running away from the schooner, which, seeming to discover this fact, changed her course and soon disappeared from sight in the gathering darkness.

"We must go about on the starboard tack now, Boss, and I'm glad we did not have to do it while that fellow was after us."

"Yas, sah, for we'd have had to go 'bout, as de water hain't over deep ahead, as you know, sah."

The Lady Maud now started upon her starboard tack, Irving determined to make a long one, and all came up on deck, having been at supper during the little chase.

The night was cloudy and quite dark, so that a vessel was not discovered by the lookout, for she had no lights out, until the yacht was within a quarter of a mile of her.

"What is she, Irving?" asked the colonel of his son, who was looking at her through his glass.

"Ready about! set all sail, Boss, and lose no time about it!" cried Irving suddenly to the surprise of all.

"What do you make of her, my son?" repeated the colonel, this time anxiously.

"She is a schooner, sir, that chased us half a league or so while you were all at supper."

"And her character?"

"She is either an armed Government schooner, or a pirate, sir."

"I hope— Hal!"

The colonel's words were cut short by beholding a light flash from the stranger, followed by the deep boom of a gun and the roar of a solid shot over the yacht.

"My God! what does he mean?" cried the colonel.

"He means that we shall lay to, sir; but we out-footed him this evening and we can do it again."

"But he will fire upon us."

"We must take the chances, father."

"But it may after all be a Government cruiser."

"And it may not, sir, and we will not wait to find out— Ah! there comes another shot!"

"Into the cabin, sis, you and the other ladies!" cried Irving, as a second shot came near the yacht.

"No, Irving, I will remain on deck; but see, she fires again," said Maud, calmly.

A third shot passed just over the deck, and a fourth and fifth were rapidly fired.

"We are dropping him rapidly," said Irving, joyfully.

But as he spoke a shot came tearing along, and, striking the bowsprit, shivered it to atoms.

Instantly the Lady Maud fell off her course, and all looked at each other in amazement and horror, while the groans from one of the negro crew made them shudder.

"Come, Boss, we must run out another spar and rig it," shouted Irving, not in the least discouraged, and he ran forward to carry out his words, when a second shot shivered the top-mast, and the sail came fluttering downward like some huge bird sorely wounded.

"Ho, Irving, he will blow us out of water."

"We must surrender and take the chances," cried Colonel Brandt, fearing lest the schooner would next pour a broadside upon the yacht.

"Ay, ay, sir, we can do nothing else," and seizing a lantern, Irving waved it around his head as a signal.

"He understands it, and has ceased firing,"

and we will soon know what he is— Look there!"

As Irving spoke another vessel swept into view.

It was a lugger smaller than the schooner, but trim as a pleasure-craft, and with a cloud of canvas above her decks.

In their excitement none on the Lady Maud had noticed her being near, and now she swept across the yacht's stern, went about, as though on a pivot, and headed so as to meet the schooner.

"What is she?" cried the colonel.

"An armed vessel, sir, that is certain," answered Barton Keys.

"And crowded with men," said his father.

"Here, Boss, it looks as if those two were going to fight between themselves, so we'll rig a bowsprit and leave them to do it," and Irving went forward to go on with his interrupted work, while Maud followed him to see what could be done for the wounded sailor.

"He don't need no help, Missy Maud, for he am dead," said Boss, sadly.

"Who is it, Boss?"

"Black Harry, missy."

"Poor fellow, he is out of all misery," and Maud walked at once more.

Just as she reached her father all eyes were turned upon the schooner and the lugger, which were not far apart, and every one on the yacht heard the hail and what followed:

"Ho, the schooner!"

"Aho, the lugger!"

"You must not molest that yacht."

"She is my prize, and I will take her."

"She is under my convoy, and I warn you off."

"I saw your signal, and understood that you were a free rover; but who are you?" came from the schooner.

Both vessels had luffed up until their sails were fluttering, and their headway being checked, their commanders could readily hear each other, and distinctly came the answer to the question from the schooner:

"I am Palafox, the Sea Fox."

All on the yacht stood in breathless silence now, while they waited for the answer of the schooner's commander:

"And I am Brazos, the Buccaneer."

"Then, as a brother freebooter, I ask you to let your yacht go on her way."

"I will not, for I want just such a craft as she is, and I get a rich prize I know."

"Then you will have to fight for her, for I am king in these waters," came in trumpet tones from the lugger, and almost at once there followed in the same voice:

"Ho, the Lady Maud!"

"Aho, the lugger!" shouted back Irving Brandt.

"Get off as quickly as you can and I will protect you."

A cheer came from all on the yacht at these words, but it was silenced by the guns of the lugger opening fire upon the schooner, which seemed taken by surprise, for it was some little time before she returned the fire.

But hardly had the fight been well begun when the yacht forged ahead, for her crew had worked like beavers and rigged a bowsprit with wonderful rapidity.

With a free wind she glided away, leaving the rival buccaneers fighting fiercely for victory, and the Lady Maud was a league distant when the boom of the last shot died away, telling that the battle had ended; but whether for their brave defender or against him they could not tell.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE PIRATE'S DAUGHTER.

"A CARD for you, missy," and Ellizette came into the room where her mistress was seated looking over some purchases she had that morning made, for the scene has changed to a fashionable hotel in New Orleans from the deck of the Lady Maud, flying from a buccaneer.

Without other adventure the yacht had run around to her anchorage in the river opposite the city, and the passengers had scattered to their respective homes, excepting the colonel, Maud and Irving, who had put up at the hotel during their week's stop in the city.

Maud took the card languidly and glanced at it.

Then she started, her face flushed and then turned pale.

"Where are they, Ellizette?" she said hurriedly.

"In the salon, missy."

"Ellizette, I wish you to show them up to my room here, and, mind you, you remain in the hall, and should my father or brother ask for me, say that I went out shopping this morning."

"Yes, missy."

"Remember, I do not wish to be in to any one, or that any one shall know that these visitors are here."

"Yes, missy, I'll go and ask 'em up, and he's a awful nice old gent'man, for he gave me this gold piece when he told me to bring up his card, and the little girl is pretty as a Christmas doll, missy."

"Ask them up, Ellizette."

"Yes, missy," and the quadroon disappeared.

But she soon returned and ushered into the room a man of striking appearance, with gray hair and beard, and a young girl of exquisite beauty.

Both were dressed richly, but in perfect taste, and seemed of the higher walks of life.

"Miss Brandt, I hope we have not intruded, and I am really honored that you so kindly received us," said the gentleman in a courtly way.

"You have not intruded, Captain Pa—"

"Pardon me, Captain Marsden, Miss Brandt."

"I am glad to be corrected, and you are welcome," and Maud grasped the hand of the man, and drew toward her the little girl, and kissed her.

"You must pardon me for asking you up to my room, but I thought it best, though you are so disguised into an old gentleman that I would never have known you."

"There are many who know me here, Miss Brandt, as I am, and it is necessary that I should use a perfect disguise; but Myrtle is the same," he added, with a smile.

"Yes, she is just as beautiful, but with a happier look, I think, than when I saw her last."

"She is happier, for she is craving to become such a lady as you are."

"And she shall become far better and more beautiful, I hope; but let me tell you that I have twice seen Madam Chotard, and she promises to take Myrtle and be a mother to her, and I wish to take her there with me tomorrow, or rather I will meet her there."

"I know not how to thank you, Miss Brandt, for your kindness, and I hope some day to prove how deeply I appreciate it."

"Ah, sir, I have far more to thank you for, as you not only kept your promise to me; but also saved us from capture on our way here, and most anxious have I been about you, for your foe seemed the larger."

"He was killed, and his vessel is now my prize, Miss Brandt, and he forfeits her for interfering with a brother pirate, who warned him off, for we sea rovers have laws among ourselves that are binding."

"I congratulate you upon your victory, sir, and am under obligations to you which I cannot repay."

"Oh, no, for what you do for Myrtle more than repays the little services which I have rendered you."

"But do you not wish to know of Mr. Carr?"

"Yes, what of him?" asked Maud, in a voice she intended should be indifferent, while her face lightly flushed as she spoke.

"Poor fellow, he stayed with us at the haunt quietly for some days, and then, disguised as a fisherman, started off."

"He was gone a couple of days, and then returned, looking very miserable."

"I asked him what ailed him, and he said that he had been forced to become an eavesdropper to a conversation which two persons were holding on the end of a pier."

"He was under it in his boat, it seems, and could not get away."

"What he heard he did not tell me; but he said that it had decided him upon his future course, which was to seek a home in some far-away land."

"He sailed with us when we left the lagoon, and fought like a tiger in our battle with Buccaneer Brazos; but the next day, at his request, I put him on board of a vessel bound for Vera Cruz, and I fear I shall never see him again, yet hope so, for I never met a man in whom I was more interested, Miss Brandt, than in Bradford Carr."

Maud heard in silence all that had been said

of Bradford Carr, and then tried to appear herself; but it was a failure, and seeing her emotion, the pirate and his daughter took their leave, promising to be at Madam Chotard's the following day at the appointed hour.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"SAIL HO! A BUCCANEER!"

As the reader now knows, from the story told Maud, by Palafox, the Pirate, the boatman under the pier during the conversation of the father and daughter, was Bradford Carr.

Free as he was, he had determined to risk all to see Maud.

Then he would make known to her his love, tell her that for her he would give up his idea of becoming a priest, if she would only be his when he had proven to her that he was guiltless of the murder of Soule Ravelle.

Did she make him this promise, he would devote himself to the one act of tracing down the murderer of the young planter, and, by bringing him to justice, clear his own name of the brand upon it.

For this purpose he had gone to the vicinity of the Blue Anchor, and was delighted to see Maud upon the end of the pier, when just as he was going to speak with her he beheld her father's approach, and, caught as he was beneath the arbor, he was unintentionally an eavesdropper, hearing all that had passed.

Once he heard her pledge to sacrifice herself to save her father, he felt that he had no hope, and, in almost despair he started back to the Dismal Forest and rejoined his kind friend the pirate chief.

Determined to seek another land where he could bury his love and become a recluse from the world, his thoughts turned upon Spain, and thither he made up his mind to go, for he spoke the language perfectly.

With this intention he left the pirate haunt with Palafox and Myrtle in the lugger, and he it was that sighted the yacht and saw her danger from the schooner.

Instantly Palafox determined to save the Lady Maud and those on board, and the reader has seen how nobly he did it.

But the fight was a desperate one, for the schooner was the larger vessel, her armament heavier, and her crew one third more.

But, against all odds Palafox fought and won, and the schooner struck to him after her captain fell dead upon her decks.

Placing Conrad in charge, Palafox sent her on to the Dismal Forest, her crew being perfectly willing to serve one piratical master as well as another, so that booty was theirs.

Then Captain Palafox continued on in the Devil Fish for New Orleans, boldly running her into the mouth of the river where he hailed an outward bound vessel, at the request of Bradford Carr, who went on board of her as a passenger.

The lugger had been so disguised the night before that she looked like a peaceable lumber craft, for her guns had been put into the hold, and planking piled on deck in such a way as to make her appear very little like a fleet skimmer of the sea.

In the battle with the Buccaneer Brazos, Bradford Carr had acted as an officer, for he was a good seaman, and had fought like a fiend, winning the admiration of the lugger's crew, while her commander told him frankly that his victory was due to his courage and desperate attacks upon the enemy.

Through the whole fight he had seemed to bear a charmed life, and it seemed to Captain Palafox that he was seeking death upon the vessel's deck.

When he found that Bradford Carr was going to leave him, the really noble hearted pirate fixed up for him a chest of clothing, of which he had plenty on board, and slipped into it a purse heavy with gold which he felt might come in well some day for the poor wanderer.

Then, with deep regret the pirate and Myrtle bade him good by, the few men visible on the lugger gave him a cheer, and he went on board the vessel which had been hailed, and which was a Spanish brig bound for Vera Cruz and South American ports.

But misfortune was determined to dog the steps of Bradford Carr, for hardly had the Spanish brig dropped the land out of sight, when the lookout at the mast-head sent down to the deck the thrilling cry:

"Sail ho!"

The Spanish captain went up into the rigging and took a long survey of the stranger.

as she raised above the horizon rapidly, and then hastily descended to the deck.

Instantly his orders rung out to his crew to crowd sail on the brig, and, as the vessel forged swiftly through the waters, heading away from the stranger, he turned to his mate, and said:

"I know the craft."

"What is she, senor?"

"Our old enemy Bernardo."

"The buccaneer?" cried the mate turning pale.

"Yes, and we must run for it, as you remember his threat."

"To massacre every one on board your vessel, senor, should he capture us again?"

"Yes, in revenge for the trick you played him in Vera Cruz!"

"I led him into a trap which nearly sent him to the yard-arm, and would have done so, had he not taken desperate chances and made his escape."

"He sent me word afterward, that when next he overhauled me on the high seas he would kill me and all with me, and it has leaked out, so that I get few passengers now, and find it hard to ship a full crew."

All this Bradford Carr heard, for he stood near the captain and his mate, idly leaning over the top-sail and gazing at the distant vessel, which was steadily gaining upon the brig.

With the knowledge he possessed, of the foul between the Spanish captain and Bernardo the Buccaneer, Bradford Carr thought that he had made a mistake in hitting upon the brig as a means of conveyance from his native land.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PADRES OF ST. ELMO.

It did not take Bradford Carr long to discover that the brig was being overhauled by the vessel in chase, at a rate of speed that would bring her alongside in a few hours more.

If the craft was the schooner of Bernardo the Buccaneer, then the chances of escape were slim indeed he well knew.

At the time of which I write the West Indian waters, the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico were infested with buccaneers, a few of them being noted as most cruel wretches with no mercy in their souls.

"Among them Bradford Carr had heard the names of Bernardo and Brazos, both Spaniards, as the most bloodthirsty monsters, and he was glad to feel that the passenger list of the brig and her crew were small, there not being over a score of souls on board, all told."

In the passenger list there were a merchant of Vera Cruz and five Mexican priests, known as the Padres of St. Elmo.

Then came Bradford Carr and the captain and his crew.

The padres were a dark-faced set of men, wearing their long gowns and caps, and stood apart among themselves, while the Vera Cruz merchant was willing to talk to anybody who would listen to him.

Seeing that the schooner was indeed an armed vessel, Bradford Carr said to the captain, addressing him in perfect Spanish:

"Do you recognize that craft now as Bernardo's vessel, senor, since you have had a closer look at her?"

"Ah! do you know the craft, too?" quickly asked the captain.

"No, senor, but I overheard what you said to the mate."

"Well, senor, it is Bernardo's schooner, and I tell you that those padres are the Jonahs that have brought me ill luck, for I never carried a priest yet that something did not go wrong before the voyage was ended."

"You are severe upon the n, senor, for they are good men and will have to suffer with the rest."

"Not they, for Bernardo will never harm a padre, do what else he might, and if you have any influence with them you had better ask them to pray for the good of our souls, for we are as good as murdered, every one of us excepting those Jonahs."

Bradford Carr said no more but walked over toward the padres and addressed a few words to them in Latin.

Instantly he caught their attention, and then he told them that he had been a student of their church, and the right hand of fellowship was at once extended to him.

Together they stood watching the coming schooner, and Bradford Carr made known to

his new-found friends what he had overheard the captain tell the mate.

Not one of them showed the slightest quiver of fear, but simply crossed themselves and began to tell their beads.

Nearer and nearer came the schooner, and the Spanish captain, realizing what fate awaited him, made what preparations he could for defense, or at least to fight unto the bitter end.

At last, just as the sun set in the Gulf, the schooner fired her first gun, and sent a shot so near the brig that it splashed spray upon her deck.

Still the brig held on her way and shot after shot now began to fall thick and fast about the flying vessel, the captain standing grimly at the helm and holding her on her course.

"That is Bernardo, for I recognize him as he stands by the side of his helmsman," said the captain as he turned his glass for an instant upon the schooner.

"That is bad," he continued as a shot plowed along the decks, cutting down two of his men.

Still he held on, and hot and fast the shots were poured upon the brig, hitting her sails, splintering her spars, cutting gullies in her decks, tearing through her bulwarks and spreading death and suffering on all sides.

At last a shot came that shivered the taff-rail and a splinter was driven into the heart of one of the padres.

With a groan he sunk into the arms of Bradford Carr, who, believing him still alive, bore him down into the cabin, just as a broadside was hurled upon the brig, which seemed to sweep her decks.

A moment after the schooner was laid alongside the brig, half a hundred men followed their desperate leader on the deck of the fated vessel, and then came the merciless cry in stentorian tones:

"Cut down every soul on board!"

"Spare no man, for I have doomed all that sail on this craft to death!"

Wild yells followed this cruel order, and then arose the cry:

"Hold! back, you devils, and touch not those holy men, for are you blind that you see not that they are priests?"

The men fell back at the startling command of their leader, and the fight had ended, the brig had been taken, and all that remained alive of those that had been aboard were the five padres of St. Elmo.

These holy men stood in a group, silent and stern, amid the death and ruin about them, for Bernardo the Buccaneer never raised a weapon against a priest.

CHAPTER L.

PADRE BIANCO.

It did not take the buccaneers long to clear the brig of her dead, repair damages and have her ready for sailing, for Bernardo's men were but too well used to such work, and much practice had made them perfect in the duties devolving upon them as sea cut-throats.

The padres, at the request of Bernardo, had gone into the cabin and remained there through the night.

Early the next morning, when the repairs were made and he was to sail, Bernardo found the padres kneeling around the body of a man that lay upon the floor dead.

At his coming they went on with their prayers, and in respectful silence, with hat off, he stood awaiting for them to finish.

As he stood there, his dark, evil face lighted up by the dim cabin lamp, he looked the fiend that he was, for the presence of death, and the pious padres, with their prayers, could not soften a countenance branded deep with a thousand crimes.

At last, still chanting the prayers for the dead, the padres arose and bore the body of the dead man on deck and cast it into the sea, Bernardo following them, and commanding silence from the crew.

As they completed their sacred duty, the buccaneer leader said to them:

"Holy fathers, I knew not that you were on board this vessel, else I would have allowed her to go unmolested until another time."

"But her captain sought to have me hanged, and played me false, and I swore a vendetta against him, and the fishes are now feeding upon his body."

"But whither do you go?"

"To the Monastery of St. Elmo, in Mexico," said one, who appeared to be spokesman.

"Well, as I send this prize under an officer

to my retreat, he shall land you at the monastery, or at least all but one of you."

"We are brothers, and must go together," said the padre spokesman.

"No, one of you must remain with me."

"And why is this?"

"I will tell you, holy fathers, that of late I have met with reverses, and I went to the Indies to consult a witch as to the cause. She told me that luck would follow me if I carried upon my vessel a holy man."

"Not against his will surely, my son?"

"Yes, padre, the witch told me that I must even land at some convent or monastery and get one before the full of another moon, unless I met with a holy man traveling upon the sea."

"On this brig I find five, and one of you must go with me on my schooner."

The padres talked together for a while in Latin, which Bernardo did not understand, and then the spokesman said:

"We are five brother padres, and our duties call us to our monastery; so that you will have to look elsewhere for a priest, my son, and curses not blessings will follow you if you heed the advice of a heathen witch—one accursed of God and man!"

Bernardo uttered an oath, and muttered something which the padres did not understand.

An ignorant Spaniard, swayed still by the religion he had disregarded and outraged, he yet was governed more by the superstition of the age in which he lived, and had gone to a pretended witch to consult her as to his want of success of late.

He had ever before respected priests, and meant to do so now; but he stood in abject fear of the power of the witch, and was determined to obey her commands, come what might.

The padres watched him closely, though they showed no sign of fear for the result, and after a moment of thought the buccaneer decided upon his course, and said:

"One of you shall go with me, and you may draw lots as to who it shall be."

The padres glanced at each other and said a few words together, after which the spokesman said:

"If we refuse to draw lots, my son, what will you do?"

"Order my men to seize one of you, and carry him on board my schooner there."

They saw that he was determined, and after a further conversation, the same one who had before spoken said:

"My son, we will draw lots to see which one of our number shall go with you."

"You are wise, and I promise you that your comrade, whose lot it falls to to go with me, shall be well treated."

Then calling to one of his men to bring him a small bag, he placed in it five bullets, one of which he made a mark upon which he would know.

Then, at his command the padres thrust their hands, one by one, into the bag and drew out each a bullet.

"Let me see them," said Bernardo, and the five padres held forth their hands, the bullet they had each drawn being between their fingers.

Glancing at the different bullets, Bernardo, the Buccaneer, said in a loud tone, as he looked at the one held by the last padre in the row:

"Here, Senor Priest, you hold the marked bullet, and it falls to your lot to go with me upon my pirate schooner."

Not a word was uttered by the other four, while the one who had drawn the fatal bullet said calmly:

"I accept the alternative, Bernardo, the Buccaneer."

"You do well, and you shall not regret it."

"Now give me your name, and while the men are getting your kit on board, bid your brothers farewell."

"My name is Padre Bianco," was the reply, and, after a word of farewell to the others, the chosen priest sprung lightly on board the schooner, the grapnels were cast off, and the two vessels swung apart, Padre Bianco waving farewell to his brothers, from whom he had been so cruelly separated.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PADRE STRIKES BACK.

WHEN the two vessels, the pirate schooner and the brig, her prize, had placed considerable distance between them, Bernardo called out to the padre:

"Senor Padre, we will go to breakfast now, and remember you have every right on board my vessel, except the right of going on shore, and this I withhold from you everywhere we may touch, excepting at my retreat, and there you can land and have full sway among the sinners, while hearing their confessions will keep you busy day and night."

Padre Bianco seemed to have determined to make the best of his situation, and followed Bernardo into the cabin, where a most tempting breakfast was set out for them, for the old pirate was an epicure, and took every opportunity of keeping the larder of his vessel well filled.

As the days passed on, Bernardo found his priestly companion a most clever person, and one whose society he really began to enjoy immensely, while his influence with the men was very great, his slightest word being law with them.

After a successful cruise of robbery and murder upon the high seas, the pirate schooner set sail for her rendezvous, for sending home prizes, and losses in battle had reduced the crew to one-third.

The retreat of Bernardo was upon a desolate part of the Mexican coast, upon an island surrounded by lagoons, and where no honest craft would care to penetrate.

Here, in *adobe* huts dwelt the pirates when ashore, and in a small harbor were anchored the vessels captured, and which were there overhauled and changed, so that they could be taken into different seaports and sold.

The brig was undergoing this disguising process when the schooner arrived, and Padre Bianco hastened to see the officer who had brought her in, and ask him about his brother priests.

"I landed at night, Senor Padre, and escorted them to the Monastery St. Elmo," said the officer.

"I am glad, my son, to know that you did your duty by them, and you will receive your reward accordingly," responded Padre Bianco.

As the schooner needed overhauling, which would require a couple of weeks, Bernardo, as was his wont, started overland for Vera Cruz, where he had agents who sold his pirated wares.

On leaving he said:

"Padre Bianco, Lieutenant Cisvero is in command, of course, but I wish you to have an eye over all, for in my absence there is always trouble among my officers and men.

"The fact is, I hold them so tight that they hate me and I believe would like to see me out of the way, so that I dread to leave my retreat, not knowing what to expect upon my return.

"But you have immense influence among them, and though I hold you as a prisoner, I yet leave you in charge to a certain degree, knowing that you can control them where my under officers cannot."

"I will do all in my power to preserve order, Senor Bernardo," answered the padre, and the chief departed on his trip to Vera Cruz.

For two weeks he was absent, and upon his return he was met at the landing by Padre Bianco, who, in response to the greeting of the chief, said sternly:

"Senor Bernardo, you are my prisoner!"

At the same moment Padre Bianco had drawn a sword from beneath his gown and presented it at the heart of the amazed pirate captain.

"*Madre de Dios!* What does this mean?" shrieked Bernardo.

"It means, El Capitan Bernardo, that I command here and you are my prisoner," was the stern reply of the padre.

"Ho, men! rally around me and hurl that dog of a priest into the sea," yelled the mad-dened pirate chief, still held at the point of the priest's sword.

But not a man of the hundred about him moved, and the next command of the padre showed that he was master of the situation.

"Seize that man!"

At the order of the padre a dozen men sprung forward with drawn weapons, and four of them seized Bernardo and in spite of his fierce resistance, he was quickly disarmed and put in irons.

"Treacherous dog of a padre, you shall rue this.

"Ay, all of your creed shall know what it is to strike at Bernardo the Buccaneer!" came

through the shut teeth of the infuriated pirate chief.

"Silence, base man that you are, for you have disgraced the form you bear and been but a human monster.

"Now your career has ended, for within ten minutes' time, as you have sent many beings out of this world, so rid I the world of you."

"Mercy! mercy! for the love of the Virgin give me time to pray!" cried the cowardly wretch, realizing that his hour of death was at hand.

"Yes, you shall have time to pray."

"And, padre as you are, hear my confession and absolve me of my sins!"

"No, for your confession would blister the ears that heard it, and for such as you there is no absolution.

"If you can pray to the God you have defied, do so now, for your life must end in a few minutes more."

The padre spoke in a deep, stern voice that impressed all who heard it, and fell like a knell upon the ears of the guilty wretch brought face to face with the eternity into which he had launched so many souls.

In a cringing voice he prayed, beseeching mercy he felt should be denied him, and seeing that he was only trying to gain time, Padre Bianco said in a voice that reached every ear:

"Men, do as I have commanded you!"

Shrieking, cursing, struggling, praying, Bernardo the Buccaneer was borne to the shore, carried on board his own schooner, and strung up to the fore yard,* the padre and his former crew looking on in silence until death came to carry off his cowardly soul.

CHAPTER LII.

THE PIRATE PRIEST.

MONTHS have passed away since the death of Bernardo by command of the Padre Bianco, and in that time strange stories have been told over land and sea.

Stories of how a swift-sailing schooner is cruising the seas, flagless, yet supposed to be a buccaneer, though waging a merciless war upon all—buccaneers and other vessels alike, it is said.

Tracing the stories, few could get at the real truth, though all united in saying that this strange schooner, flying no flag, was *commanded by a priest!*"

Now and then a pirate could be found who would tell how his vessel had been run down, boarded and taken, while the crew were placed in irons and landed upon the nearest shores.

Such had been his fate, and he had escaped death with his companions, and had wandered about the land, fearing again to trust himself at sea.

This man told how the vessel that had taken his pirate craft was commanded by a priest in full holy garb, and yet fought like a tiger and led his boarders with an impetuosity that was astounding.

With such a foundation for a story, it is no wonder that the wildest rumors were afloat, and that the Pirate Priest was a name that was on everybody's lips, and he formed the theme of many a yarn and the subject of conversation in many a home.

And such was the theme of conversation among a group of officers that stood upon the quarter-deck of a small schooner that lay at anchor in an inlet upon what is now the Texan, but then the Mexican, coast.

"I confess, captain," said one, "that now we have cut out our vessel, what I most fear is that Pirate Priest, who they say makes war upon buccaneers, hoping to find treasure with them which he would not get elsewhere."

"Yes; as there is honor among thieves, he should spare his own ilk," laughed another, while a third remarked:

"Well, I have gotten to that state now, Thornton, where I have nothing to fear.

"With me it came to death by suicide or risking death as a pirate to get riches, and I am determined to win wealth by piracy, that I may one day go back and reap a rich harvest of revenge upon the man who brought only dishonor upon me," and the speaker uttered his words in bitterness of spirit.

"Well, I suppose it was my fault, Captain Chester, that the world went wrong with me; but certain it is that it began to use me so ill of late, that I was glad to accept your offer of a lieutenancy and go with you upon this craft,"

* Schooners with yards on the foremast were common in early days.—THE AUTHOR.

remarked the one who had been addressed as Thornton.

"And you, Sykes, I knew was in trouble," said Captain Chester, addressing the third one in the group.

"I should think so, when I owed every other man I met, and was dodging constables day and night.

"I tell you I would rather be a pirate and run the risk of being hanged, than a debtor and be dunned."

The three speakers were all young men, and their appearance indicated that they had been born gentlemen, whatever they had degenerated into.

They were dressed in a uniform that looked strangely like that worn by our navy officers, and their vessel, a saucy-looking schooner of a hundred tons, had the appearance of having been in the revenue service, although at her peak when she is presented to the reader, fluttered a flag with a strange device.

It was a black field, which was most suggestive of piracy, and in the center was a white hand, holding a number of cards, the "aces" and "jacks" being most prominent.

Around the wrist of the card-holding hand was a manacle to which was attached a chain, all being suggestive of the one who owned the flag having been chained to the vice of gambling, which he could not throw off and which had ended in making him a pirate.

The truth must be told that such was the case with the young captain of the schooner, for, when brought to ruin by his sins, he had conceived the idea of cutting out a revenue cutter that was being fitted out for sea and had but a few men as a guard on board of her.

With kindred spirits he had laid his plot, a crew of reckless men had been shipped, and the pretty little vessel had been cut out from her anchorage and carried to sea by the daring amateur pirates, who had raised their flag, an emblem of the ruin of all of them above their decks.

And, as they stood chatting together upon the quarter-deck while their vessel lay at anchor in a small cove, hidden from view, the lookout, stationed in the top of a high tree on the shore, reported a sail in sight.

At once they were deeply interested, for they had sought that secluded cove to lie in wait for a swift-sailing vessel said to visit that part of the coast twice a year to smuggle the finest Spanish wines and costliest silks into Mexico for the rich Dons and their wives.

It would be a rich haul for them, and most anxious were they to capture the prize, which it was said would run into the inlet and drop anchor not far off-shore, where she could remain securely hidden until the allies on land came to receive her valuable cargo.

"I hope it is the Spanish smuggler," said the young captain.

"I hope it is not the Pirate Priest," rejoined Thornton.

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Sykes.

"We will hardly know to-night, for darkness will soon be upon us," remarked the captain, and as night came on the three adjourned to the cabin to enjoy themselves over a bottle of wine.

It was after midnight when an under officer, who had been sent out to reconnoiter, returned and reported that the strange sail had run into the inlet and dropped anchor.

"What is she, Ross?"

"A large schooner, captain."

"A schooner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that the sail the lookout reported?"

"Yes, sir."

"There was no word sent us of whether the Spaniard was to be a schooner, brig or barque."

"As she has run in by night and dropped anchor in the very inlet where we expected the Spanish smuggler, it must be that craft," remarked the pirate lieutenant, Thornton.

"Did she appear to be armed, Ross?" asked the captain.

"No, sir, as well as I could judge she had no open ports."

"Were you very near her?"

"In less than a cable's length, sir."

"Were there many on board of her?"

"There seemed to be but very few, sir, hardly more than half a dozen as well as I could find out."

"Very well, I shall soon know, for I shall go myself in a boat to find out all about her."

"No, Captain Chester, your duty is here, and I will go," said Thornton.

"As you please, Thornton, only start at once, for it will be daybreak soon."

"I'll go now, sir, and I hope to bring you good news," and shortly after the pirate lieutenant was on his way to find out what the strange vessel was that had anchored in the inlet below.

CHAPTER LIII.

AN UNWELCOME DISCOVERY.

THORNTON, the pirate lieutenant was thirsting for distinction, in the new and sinful career he had chosen, and he thought as his boat moved slowly along, that if the schooner happened to be the smuggler, and he could capture her and run her up to Captain Chester as a prize, it would be a great triumph for him.

He had brought with him but half a dozen men; but they were all well armed, and if the schooner was the smuggler, sailing a merchantman, she certainly would not carry, he thought, more than that number as a crew, and taking them by surprise would be half the battle.

But, unfortunately for the buccaneer officer he was thinking, and not looking, and took the wrong channel, which led him off his course.

When at length he got right once more it was daybreak.

But he held on his way and soon came in sight of the schooner.

She was certainly anchored in a place where it looked as though she sought to hide away.

Then she looked very peaceable, too.

No one was visible upon her decks, and there was no way of getting a look over her high bulwarks to see if she was armed.

But her sides did not seem to be pierced for ports, and after a talk with his men, Thornton came to the conclusion that it was the anxiously looked for smuggler, and his men backed up this opinion.

"Pull out from this cover, lads, and see if we make any one notice us," he ordered.

But no sign of life showed itself on board the mysterious vessel, and the pirates kept edging their boats nearer and nearer.

At last the boat reached a position where it must either go on and face the consequences, or retreat.

"Bah! they think they are in perfect safety, and the watch are all asleep."

"It certainly is the smuggler," said Thornton.

The men thought as he did, and then he decided to pull for the schooner.

Slowly the boat moved through the waters, and as noiselessly as possible, and yet no one was visible upon the schooner.

Nearer and nearer, until but a few rods separated them from the coveted prize, and yet no man had been seen peering over her high bulwarks.

Was it a trap?

Were all on board asleep?

Was it the smuggler?

These questions were asked; but no satisfactory answer could be returned.

"Men, we have gone too far to go back now."

"Give way!"

The boat's crew obeyed with a will, and they shot forward through the water toward the silent craft.

The sun was just rising as the boat ranged alongside, and the black hull, spars, and furled sails stood out in bold relief.

"Boarders aboy!"

"Follow me!"

With his words, Thornton leaped up the side of the schooner, and over upon her deck, his sword in one hand, his pistol in the other.

Behind him came his men, also armed to the teeth.

With cheers they rushed along the deck toward the stern, and not a man yet met them to offer the slightest opposition.

"Come, lads, the prize is ours," shouted Thornton, wildly, as he sprung toward the cabin.

But his joy was short-lived, for suddenly out of the cabin companionway bounded a tall form, and one that spread terror to the hearts of the boarders.

In one hand he held a cutlass, in the other was upraised a large cross, while he was dressed in the garb of a priest.

Halting before the pirates, who shrunk back in horror, he cried in trumpet tones:

"Off of this craft, I command you, or remain and die!"

Then came from the lips of Thornton, in almost a shriek:

"It is the Pirate Priest!"

"Back, men, for the love of God!"

They needed no second bidding; but turned in terror, and threw themselves into their boat.

Seizing their oars, they shot away across the waters, and never paused until they had reached the shelter of the land.

Then, to their surprise, they saw the schooner set her sails, and under pressure of a fair breeze, stand out of the inlet toward the sea.

Then they pulled back to their own vessel to tell the strange story.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE PIRATE'S THREAT.

WHEN Thornton returned to the schooner, and reported to his comrades the mysterious conduct of the strange vessel, no one was able to find a solution to it.

The Pirate Priest certainly had the power, as was afterward shown, to have cut the pirates down upon his deck, or to have sunk their boat upon returning.

Thornton had noticed that there were guns on the schooner; in fact she seemed thoroughly armed, and that she was manned was very evident by the men he had seen setting sail.

Yet she had made no hostile demonstration toward them, and other than the fact that the priest had so suddenly appeared before them and his words had been threatening, they had not met with opposition.

The more he thought over the matter, as he rowed back to the schooner, Thornton felt that he had been frightened off by a threat, and cursed himself for not having run the priest through, and, while his men were below decks, to have taken the vessel.

Thus thinking and regretting, he was prepared for the question from Captain Chester:

"Why did you run off, Thornton?"

"That is a question I now am trying to answer for myself, sir."

"You are no coward certainly."

"I have not suffered under that imputation."

"I know that, and you possess nerve."

"I'm confident of that, having been tried."

"It is remarkable."

"It is, I admit: but the truth is, as far as I can solve it, I was confident that it was the smuggler, and assured of capturing her, it was like an apparition to see that tall priest, armed with cross and cutlass, suddenly appear before me."

"The stories I had heard of him flashed upon me, and seeing that the men were as anxious as I was to get away, I got demoralized, obeyed his stern orders to the letter, and got off his deck with a precipitancy that was amusing, to remember it now when it is over."

"You should have run the Pirate Priest through and seized the vessel."

"That is just what I should have done, Captain Chester."

"But I did not do it."

"Well, the thought comes upon me that we could not do better than to capture that man."

"Capture him, sir?" asked both of the pirate lieutenants in a breath.

"Yes."

"But how, sir?"

"Every vessel runs from him!"

"Yes, sir."

"We will run after him."

"But he is said to be unconquerable."

"We will test that."

"And his vessel, they say, sails like the wind."

"So does this schooner."

"She carries eight guns, sir."

"And we carry seven."

"But his are of larger caliber."

"Then we must fight him at closer quarters, Thornton."

"I see you are determined, captain."

"I am."

"It may be a good idea, sir."

"I am sure that it will be."

"The stories tell of how he has boundless treasure and carries it upon his schooner."

"That is just what prompts me to hunt him down, for, by capturing his vessel, we can enrich ourselves at one blow, and take our necks out of the noose they are in now."

"You lead, sir, I follow."

"And I, Captain Chester," said the amateur lieutenants.

"But we must first capture the smuggler."

"The Pirate Priest may escape, if we delay, sir."

"He can be easily found, too easily for most vessels I guess."

"Oh, yes, we can find him, or he will us," laughed Thornton, while Sykes added:

"Then for the smuggler we wait."

And for the smuggler the pirate schooner did lie in wait, and when she entered the inlet, a large, stanch brig, loaded with a cargo of rare value to be smuggled into Mexico, Thornton redeemed himself after his former fiasco by capturing her at the point of the cutlass.

Having dispatched the prize to an agent who would handle her cargo for him, giving him the largest price for it, Captain Chester, true to his word, set sail in search of the Pirate Priest.

A score or more stories had they heard, while visiting a small fort by night, of the doings of this remarkable man who was cruising the seas in the garb of a padre, and with a sword drawn against every man, and it rendered all on board the schooner but the more anxious to capture him.

Though a certain superstitious dread of this priest of the sea was felt by the crew, Captain Chester did not doubt, when the guns began to roar and his men smelt powder, but that they would render a good account of themselves.

So it was settled that the Pirate Priest should be hunted down, and the pretty vessel, stolen from Uncle Sam's service by her reckless commander and crew, turned her prow over the blue waters to follow the wake of the mysterious vessel whose commander was a padre.

CHAPTER LV.

RUN DOWN.

For some months did the schooner under the amateur pirates search the seas for the Priest of the Sea, as the buccaneer padre was frequently called.

Her commander heard of the Pirate Priest, as being here, there, and seemingly everywhere, yet could not come up with him.

He cruised in the Caribbean Sea, among the West Indies, and about the Gulf, following the coast from Vera Cruz to Florida, yet seemingly never getting any nearer to carrying out his threat to hunt the Pirate Priest from the seas.

One afternoon Captain Chester stood on his quarter-deck, while his schooner was slowly gliding along the blue waters of Mississippi Sound.

"You seem sad, captain," said Thornton, his lieutenant, approaching him.

"I am sad, Thornton."

"Doubtless you are sadly disappointed at not having yet come up with the Pirate Priest?"

"I am disappointed, Thornton, though my thoughts were not just then upon the padre we have been so anxious to find, and I cannot complain if we have not come up with him, for we have been very successful in capturing valuable prizes."

"So we have, sir; but is not that a lovely shore to dwell upon?" and Thornton pointed to the coast line, where were visible here and there pleasant homes.

"It is, indeed, as I know well, for I have spent some happy, ay, and unhappy hours there."

"Indeed?"

"Do you see that grand old building half-sheltered in the live-oaks about it?"

"Yes."

"It has a harbor of its own, as you see, and is very old, having been built long years ago by a Don."

"At one time it was deserted for years, and became the resort of a band of buccaneers; but an enterprising fellow took it, added to it, and turned it into a summer retreat for the wealthy planters and the merchants of New Orleans."

"Now it is known as the Blue Anchor Inn, and I see that it is open for guests."

"Yes, my glass shows me several ladies walking on the lawn, and others are upon the piazza."

"But will you sail in nearer?"

"Yes, I see a fisherman yonder, and I will hail him to see if he can give us any news."

"He does not run away from us, I see, sir, as with our Stars and Stripes flying, and being in these waters, he doubtless takes us for one of Uncle Sam's cruisers."

"Yes, and I will not undeceive him," and as the schooner drew near the fisherman, Captain Chester hailed:

"Boat, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly responded the occupant, whom the reader has before met, for it was none other than Sandy, the assistant of Old Joe Jibboom.

"Have you seen any suspicious sail hereabouts, my man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whereaway?"

"An armed schooner ran in to the cove down the coast there, just at daybreak, and I have my idea she is no better than she should be."

"Thank you; but have you ever seen anything of the Pirate Priest in these waters?"

"Lor', sir, we hear so much of him of late that nearly every rakish craft we see in these waters is said to be the vessel of the Pirate Priest, and maybe that the schooner in the basin is the outlaw padre."

"I thank you, my man."

"Come closer in your skiff and I'll toss you a souvenir."

"Talk is cheap, sir, and I haven't earned any money."

"All right, my man, but I think differently."

"Now describe the schooner in the inlet," said Captain Chester, as the fisherman rowed near the schooner, which had luffed up while talking to him.

"She's a large schooner, carrying eight guns and with a full crew."

"She lays low in the water, but has high bulwarks, and her top-masts are painted red."

"The Pirate Priest, as I live! Come on board, my man, and be our pilot into the inlet, and your fortune is made."

"This is a United States cutter, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes, my man, that is just what she is."

"Well, sir, I'll pilot you for nothing, for it is my duty to aid you take the pirate."

"But he may have a lookout watching us, so you better stand off until after dark and then come back and I will join you."

"That is a good idea, my man; but you will not disappoint us?"

"No, no, sir, for though I am but a poor fisherman, I hold my word along with the best of 'em."

"That is right, and you must always continue to do right."

"Now let us have your fish, and we will stand down the coast around yonder point of land and return as soon as it is dark."

"I'll be here, sir," called out Sandy as the schooner continued on her way.

Just as twilight was coming on she disappeared around the point of land; but Sandy kept on fishing, and in a couple of hours he saw the schooner, under very light canvas, almost upon him.

"Schooner ahoy!" he called out, fearful of being run down.

"Ay, ay, my man, we have had our eye on you for some time."

"Now come on board and act as pilot."

Sandy was soon at the wheel, and the schooner stood inshore.

As she neared the inlet it was decided to anchor the schooner and attack in the boats, for this would give them a double chance against the Pirate Priest.

Sandy thereupon ran the schooner close inshore, her anchor was noiselessly lowered into the water, and then the three boats were called alongside and filled with men, only a few of the crew being left behind to man the vessel in case of need, or work the guns.

Sandy was in the leading boat with Captain Chester and thirty men.

Then came Thornton with twenty of the crew, and Sykes with as many more, all armed to the teeth.

Captain Chester was to board over the stern, while Sykes and Thornton were to take the starboard and port sides amidships, so that the surprise would be complete.

The oars were muffled, perfect silence was commanded, and the three boats moved up the lagoon without the slightest sound.

After a row of half an hour Sandy said in a whisper:

"There lies the schooner, sir."

"I see her, my man."

"Now, men, do your duty and the Pirate Priest is our game."

On moved the boats and though they were now in a few lengths of the schooner, no expected hail greeted them.

A moment more and Captain Chester's boat was under the stern, and springing on board he shouted:

"Follow me, men!"

With cheers the different crews boarded, and yet no one opposed them.

Seeing a bright light coming from the companionway, Captain Chester sprang down into the cabin his cutlass in his hand.

Then he started back, for a tall form confronted him.

It was a man in the full dress of a Mexican padre, and with a face that was stern, and yet sad.

His eyes were now fastened upon the intruder, and he said in a deep voice:

"Senor, you are my prisoner!"

"Lying priest, you are mine, for I have followed you for long months for the joy of this moment," and Captain Chester sprang forward to cut the priest down with his sword.

But the Pirate Priest quickly raised a large gilt cross he held in his hand and caught the blade upon it, while he placed his other hand behind him in the folds of his gown, and grasped the hilt of a sword, the act being unseen by his adversary.

CHAPTER LVI.

OVERMATCHED.

It was a thrilling scene, a striking tableau, as the two men stood there in the cabin facing each other.

The one bold, reckless, in full uniform, and with his sword, the other in priestly robes, calm and resolute, while he had his sword crossing his opponent's blade.

"Surrender, Sir Priest! for your cross is no weapon to match my sword."

"Surrender! or priest though you be I will run you through!"

Captain Chester fairly hissed the demand, and trembled with joy, feeling that he had triumphed at last.

But, with a movement as quick as a flash, the priest dropped his cross and in its place went the sword he had taken from the folds of his gown and held behind him.

"This weapon will overmatch yours, Chester Granger, and I command you to surrender," came in the deep tones of the Pirate Priest.

"Great God! you call me by name!" and momentarily unnerved by being recognized, Chester Granger lowered his guard, and in an instant his blade was struck from his hand and the point of the priest's weapon was pressed hard over his heart.

"Surrender or die! Take your choice!"

"I surrender, Sir Priest; but this is nonsense, for my men have charge of your vessel."

"You are mistaken, Chester Granger, for a part of my crew boarded and captured your schooner soon after you left it, for I gave them orders so to do, and shielded in the rigging are half a hundred gallant fellows who cover your crew on deck."

"It is false!"

"Ho, the deck!" called out the priest.

"Ay, ay, sir!" and to the horror of the man, whom the reader now recognizes as Chester Granger, a person appeared who was not one of his men.

He was dressed in uniform, and a moment was sufficient to show that he was under the orders of the priest.

"Senor, what is the news from the deck?" asked the priest, calmly.

"When the pirates heard my order to surrender, Senor Padre, and saw that they were wholly in our power, they surrendered and are now in irons."

"And this man's vessel?"

"Has run up and dropped anchor near us."

"Under my orders or his?"

"Under your orders, Senor Padre."

"Now, Chester Granger, you see that you are wholly in my power."

"Ay, and I know that face and voice now," cried Chester Granger.

"What am I?"

"You are no priest."

"Who am I?"

"You are Bradford Carr, and you it was

that has caused me all my misery and made me what I am," said the captured pirate, bitterly.

"Indeed, sir, and how have I been the cause of your ruin?" asked Bradford Carr, for the Pirate Priest was none other.

"Through that smooth-tongued fiend, Barton Keys."

"Hail your words give me the idea that you can tell that which I would know," quickly said Bradford Carr.

"I can."

"And will?"

"I must have terms."

"What terms do you wish?"

"I wish my freedom and my traps on board this vessel, with the promise that I will not be published to the world as a pirate for the sake of those that have loved me and know not what I now am."

"I grant your terms, Chester Granger, and your crew may believe you dead, and they shall be sent at once to be turned over to the Government vessel."

"Now, sir, what have you to say that will interest me?"

"I have much to tell you, but first get my men out of the way and let me feel safe, and then come here and I will talk to you."

"I will do so, but as I doubt you, let me see that you do not escape," and taking a pair of manacles, fastened by a chain to the floor, Bradford Carr clasped them upon the wrist of his prisoner and then left the cabin.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE GUILTY ONE.

It was after breakfast at the Blue Anchor Inn, and the guests were all seated upon the piazza, or standing upon the lawn, watching the approach of two vessels that were standing in toward the little harbor.

They were both armed schooners, and the one in advance was flying the United States flag, and the one astern had a flag with a sable field beneath the Stars and Stripes.

"It is a Government cutter, and she has a pirate as prize," cried Irving Brandt, who, in the year that had passed, had developed into a very handsome and manly youth.

"Let us go down to the pier, daughter, with Irving, and see what it all means," said Colonel Brandt, whose face no longer looked careworn.

Maud arose, beautiful as ever, though with a face somewhat saddened, and instantly there stepped to her side Barton Keys, who offered his arm, which she accepted in silence.

Arriving at the pier, they saw that the two vessels had dropped anchor, and a boat was coming ashore, in which were several officers and a crew of twelve oarsmen.

As it touched the pier a young officer stepped out, and, bowing politely, asked:

"Is Mr. Barton Keys here?"

"My name is Keys, sir," and the young gambler stepped forward.

"Then, sir, I arrest you in the name of the law!"

Exclamations of amazement were heard upon all sides, while Barton Keys placed his hand threateningly in his bosom and said fiercely:

"What means this outrage, and who are you, sir, that dares to insult me?"

"It means, Mr. Barton Keys, that you are a dead man if you move, and I arrest you for the murder of Soule Ravelle, one year ago to-day!"

Barton Keys staggered under the blow, while Maud gave a cry that seemed almost of joy.

Springing forward, the young officer clasped manacles upon the wrists of the gambler before he was able to recover from the shock.

Then he rallied and asked:

"Who is my accuser?"

"I am, Barton Keys."

A second cry of surprise was heard as Chester Granger, dressed neatly in citizen's attire, stepped forward.

"You! you! dare accuse me of that murder, Chester Granger?" shouted Barton Keys.

"Yes, you urged me into a plot with you to kill Soule Ravelle, because we both owed him money, and to make your villainy greater, because you feared Bradford Carr would marry Miss Maud Brandt, you arranged to have him arrive upon the scene after you had shot your first victim down, and I appearing, by your

orders, for I was your dupe, your slave, as I owed you money, and accused Bradford Carr of being the murderer, while his pistol had been taken from his room and found on the ground to further condemn him."

"Liar! no one will believe this trumped-up story, for Bradford Carr killed Ravelle, and breaking jail, has fled, guilty wretch that he is."

"I fling back the charge of guilt in your teeth, Barton Keys," and out of the crowd of seamen stepped Bradford Carr.

For an instant there was a dead silence, and then, throwing aside the officer's cloak and hat which he wore, and that had half covered up his priestly garb, Bradford Carr continued, addressing the horrified wretch whom he faced:

"Barton Keys, I nearly lost my life on the gallows through you; but, thank Heaven I escaped to track you down."

"A vessel on which I shipped for a foreign land, to hide my misery from all who knew me, was captured by Bernardo the Buccaneer, who put all on board to death but five men."

"Those five were supposed to be holy padres returning to Mexico; but, one of their number having been killed by the fire of the pirate, I assumed his garb, and, protected by it and the four good men I escaped death."

"But Bernardo had been told by a witch to carry a priest upon his vessel, and the lot fell to me."

"From that day I plotted against piracy, and, winning over his crew, believed as I was to be a padre, I had him executed for his many crimes, and, taking his vessel and crew, sailed the seas to wage war upon pirates."

"It is said that I have robbed vessels; but it is false, for I have protected them, and the haunts of half a score of buccaneers have I broken up, and as many of their cruisers have I destroyed or captured."

"The Government knows just what I have done, so that I am no Pirate Priest, but a man who has hunted down sea outlaws."

"Last night I captured yonder vessel, stolen from our Government, and being near these old familiar scenes, having with me this gentleman, Chester Granger, as a most welcome guest, I assure you, I have come here to arrest that murderer, vindicate my innocence, and thereby prove that I was not, and am not the guilty being I have been painted."

As Bradford Carr ceased speaking, Irving Brandt sprung forward and grasped his hand, and then Maud followed and others, until he had been welcomed by all back to the Blue Anchor Inn.

CHAPTER LVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE is little more to say, reader mine, to bring my story to a close, for you have doubtless surmised that Barton Keys was sent to the village jail to occupy Bradford Carr's cell, and be under the charge of honest Dick Dresden.

Also that the young tutor was prevailed upon to resume his duties at Brandt Manor, as Irving's teacher, while he was more than willing to give up his idea of the priesthood after his adventurous life, especially when Maud was the prize for which he was striving, and with every evidence of success.

The colonel kept his last promise made to his daughter, and seemed a happier man for it, while Chester Granger was glad to seek other scenes in which to spend his ill-gotten gold.

Barton Keys was tried and sentenced to the gallows, but escaped; some said, as Moke the negro assistant at the jail disappeared at the same time, with his aid, and there were many who congratulated themselves upon having gotten rid of him, even if he did not die on the gallows.

Of Palafox, the Sea Fox, little was afterward heard; but it was said by some who professed to know, that a wealthy planter dwelling upon the Mississippi river with his only daughter was none other than the famous rover, turned honest gentleman.

As for the Blue Anchor Inn, its ruins may yet be seen, and strange stories are told of it to this day, and of a desperate fight that a gallant young naval officer, Irving Brandt, had there with a band of buccaneers.

THE END.

Soon to follow, the companion story: "Cutlass and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea."

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